



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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Making People Up

Sarah Tripp

PhD

The University of Edinburgh

2016

Abstract

This thesis is a process of writing characters using a cyclical methodology to turn the writer into a reader of their own work, then back into a writer again. The components of this thesis both practice and propose writing as research and develop a concept of character that is 'relational'. Taking Donald Barthelme's assertion, 'Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how,' this thesis is attentive to the uncertainty of process: a process that has accreted knowledge in the form of characters and methods.

Making People Up is chronologically structured in order to make visible how its form was discovered through practice. The first component is a book of character studies *You are of vital importance* written in the first year of the PhD. This is followed by a reflective manuscript of essays which use a method of redescription to render a generative moment between the completion of one book and the beginning of the next. The third component is a second book *Social Script* which is a character study and a conclusion to the thesis.

Building on Adam Phillips' assertion, 'Being misrepresented is simply being presented with a version of ourselves – an invention – that we cannot agree with. But we are daunted by other people making us up, by the number of people we seem to be,' this thesis starts from the premise that in the everyday we make each other up and then goes on to use the form of the character study to explore unresolvable tensions around this process.

Building four parallel propositions: that character *is* fiction; that a relational concept of character *is* a critique of the extent to which we can know each other; that constituting the writer as a reader of their own characters renders a generative moment *and* critical reflection; that oscillating the proximity to and distance from a character provokes you, the reader, to imagine character as a relationally contingent concept.

The thesis will draw on key concepts by Christopher Bollas and Adam Phillips, literary discourse on character, reader-response criticism and a selection of literary and artistic works that have informed this process of writing characters.

Research Questions:

1. Does a relational concept of character critique claims to 'know' each other?
2. Does replacing interpretation with redescription make a reflective methodology critical and generative?
3. What kind of narrative structure will constitute a 'relational' character study?

Items constituting the thesis

1. *You are of vital importance*

Hardback book; 144 pp.; 120 x 185 mm

2. *Making People Up*

Spiral bound reflective manuscript; 161 pp.; 210 x 297 mm

3. *Social Script*

Softback book; 92 pp.; 134 x 216 mm

The chronological structure of the thesis

This thesis is chronologically structured in order to make visible how its form was found through practice. The thesis has three parts: a published book *You are of vital importance*, a reflective manuscript and an unpublished book *Social Script*. Both books have been presented in a small box and you are now holding the manuscript.

In the first year of my PhD, I wrote and edited 62 pieces of prose fiction which were published under the title *You are of vital importance*. In the second year of my PhD, I wrote the reflective manuscript. This manuscript identifies three character studies from *You are of vital importance*: *Emmet*, *Mark* and *You are of vital importance to the art community* for intensive redescription. These essays then formed the departure point for speculative notes about a forthcoming work. In the final year of my PhD, I wrote and edited a character study titled *Social Script*.

My preference would be to approach this thesis chronologically. In order to consider the three components of this thesis in relation to their chronological production, a suggested reading order is provided by the contents list on the following page.

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Introduction

1. The Premise of Practice

The fact is, imagine a man sitting on an exercise bike in a spare room. He's a pretty ordinary man except that across his eyes and also across his mouth it looks like he's wearing letterbox flaps. Look closer and his eyes and mouth are both separately covered by little grey rectangles. They're like the censorship strips that newspaper and magazines would put across people's eyes in the old days before they could digitally fuzz up or pixellate a face to block the identity of the person whose face it is.

Sometimes these strips, or bars, or boxes, would also be put across parts of the body which people weren't supposed to see, as a protective measure for the viewing public. Mostly they were supposed to protect the identity of the person in the picture from being ascertained. But really what they did was make a picture look like something underhand, or seedy, or dodgy, or worse, had happened; they were like a proof of something unspeakable.

When this man on the bike moves his head the little bars move with him like the blinkers on a horse move when the horse moves its head.

Standing next to the sitting man so that their heads are level is a small boy. The boy is working at the grey bar over the man's eyes with a dinner knife.

Ow, the man says.

Doing my best, the boy says.

He is about ten years old. His fringe is long, he is quite long-haired. He is wearing flared jeans embroidered in yellow and purple at the waistband and a blue and red T-shirt with Snoopy on the front. He forces the thing off the man's eyes so that it flicks off and up into the air almost comically and hits the floor with a metallic clatter.

This T-shirt is the first thing the man on the bike sees.

Ali Smith, *There but for the*

I begin with an image from Ali Smith's novel as a metaphor for making characters up. A man is sitting on a cycling machine, his identity is blocked by grey bars covering his eyes and mouth. The man cannot see the boy and the boy, like me, cannot see who the man is until something is done about the grey bars. The boy tries to remove a bar. As he works I feel an affinity with the boy. Like me he works hard, he has an 'idiosyncratic' dress sense and is a bit overgrown around the edges but that is just because he easily becomes immersed in his endeavours. He is working hard to look into the man's face. Working at the bar with a dinner knife is like imagining this man through the action of reading. I am just as curious about the man as the boy is. Then the bar flicks off.

But when I write, I am like the man on the bike; cycling on the spot, not going anywhere but working hard to make something happen. Then, after a while, something does happen. The writing makes something happen – the bar flicks off. The first thing glimpsed is a T-shirt, a personal effect belonging to a character. Once I have written down this glimpse the words suggest other words, I am making up a character by writing.

Being on the bike sometimes involves not speaking and not seeing anyone or anything. Time spent cycling builds leg muscles, increases fitness and makes the cyclist more at ease with the experience of not knowing. Practicing cycling also makes you better at staying on the bike. I am suggesting that being in a room, sitting on a bike cycling with the bars on, then off, then on again is an analogy for having a practice and spinning the pedals is praxis. Staying put on the same bike for your whole life could be thought of as having an ongoing practice fused to who you are and who you become through your daily pedalling.

In this thesis, I will be equally immersed in cycling and chivvying off the bars. I will write characters then read the characters I have written and write more characters. This cycle of writing, reading, writing will be augmented by literature, art and psychoanalytic writings using a methodology I will develop. And because this thesis is performative,¹ practice-led research – and the practice leading is mine – I am going to begin by describing what I recognise as practice and the preoccupations and features of my practice. Then I will consider what practice-led means in this context. Together, these will constitute my premise of practice.

As an artist, writer and lecturer I understand practice to be an ongoing configuration of daily habits, creative activities and reflective activities sustained by the conditions necessary for their performance. When I use the word ‘praxis’ I refer to the enacting of these activities. What makes a practice specific is the purpose of the habits. The activities are performed with the clear hope of making art, whatever form it takes: sculpture, book, film etc. What makes a practice idiosyncratic is the unique person practicing. Because there is something to be made, even if the artwork is ephemeral, a practice has an insistent pragmatism operating at its core. The hope of making art is coupled with the pragmatism needed to get an artwork made, together they are a generative force within creative practice. Research is part of this pragmatism. Research is undertaken to generate a work, the aim is never to acquire knowledge per se, instead just enough know-how is accumulated to complete the task in hand. There is an urgency to engage in the process of finding out what an artwork will be. This impulsive and curious ‘doing’ has been theorised by the advocate of ‘performative research’ Brad C. Haseman in his *Manifesto for Performative Research*:

Practice-led researchers construct experiential starting points from which practice follows. They tend to ‘dive in’, to commence practising to see what emerges. They acknowledge that what emerges is individualistic and idiosyncratic. This

1. BRAD C. HASEMAN, ‘A Manifesto for Performative Research’, *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue “Practice-led Research” (no. 118, 2006) (online PDF), QUT eprints, <<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3999/>>, accessed 6 Aug. 2016.

is not to say these researchers work without larger agendas or emancipatory aspirations, but they eschew the constraints of narrow problem setting and rigid methodological requirements at the outset of a project.²

Even though this thesis is a defined body of research, my practice pre-dates the moment I embarked on doctoral study and will continue afterwards. Materials and preoccupations from the deep history of my practice are constantly resurfacing. To return to my analogy, I was sitting on a bike when I began and I will be sitting on the same bike afterwards and this thesis is powered by the same legs pedalling. I perceive my practice as a continuum and this period of doctoral research appears on its timeline highlighted in a different colour: same practice but a very different *praxis*. This change in praxis is both proposed and enacted by this thesis.

My practice is not project based, instead daily praxis provides orientation and stability. I write, read, make notes, interview people, shoot film and video. I annotate texts, memorise texts, work with desktop publishing programmes like Adobe's In-Design and Illustrator and edit moving images. My artworks have taken multiple forms including: publications, solo performances, events and films. Often they take more than one form simultaneously or evolve through a number of forms over longer periods. On commencing this research I was working with narrative, intentionally keeping dénouement suspended in order to invite the audience to imagine, and re-imagine, characters. Strangers, gestures and moods are reoccurring themes in my artworks which draw from literature, psychoanalysis and pedagogy. I often use an eclectic mix of materials and sources, seek out people to interview or attend specialised courses to develop skills. The perennial features of my practice are: seeking multiple forms for a work, developing works over a long period of time and exploring character as a framework for narrative.

Throughout this reflective manuscript I will refer to 'character studies' rather than stories. I have chosen 'study' over 'story' to indicate my commitment to exploring character first and foremost, specifically characters taking a human shape. Character is my unit of study but this emphasis does not exclude or oppose other elements of narrative, or insinuate that character can be isolated from plot, atmosphere or theme. Fictional works emphasising character fall within the genre of 'character sketch', in non-fiction the equivalent term is 'character study'.³ I am using 'study' instead of 'sketch', despite working in fiction, because sketch implies a swift rendering whereas

2. BRAD C. HASEMAN, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research" (no. 118, 2006) (online PDF), QUT eprints, <<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3999/>>, accessed 6 Aug. 2016, 4.

3. LEWIS TURCO, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Non-fiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 39, 111.

study suggests the slow speed of observation as well as a shorter length. *Mrs Bridge*⁴ the novella by Evan S. Connell is an example of this slow but truncated form. Episodes from Mrs Bridge's life are succinctly described in a few paragraphs or pages yet each vignette evokes a lifetime of intricate domestic concerns and middle class fortitude. Another example would be Fernando Pessoa's heteronymns and their languorous, aphoristic observations of Lisbon.⁵ By studying character, and making character studies, I intend to step away from the principles of story⁶ and towards observation which has its own dynamism and agency within narrative.

Concepts of 'character' are common to the discourses of the narrative arts (literature, cinema and theatre) and the therapeutic branch of psychology called psychoanalysis. What strikes me is how this portability attests to the place creativity and imagination take in the making and remaking of the self. Concepts of character permeate the arts and the psychoanalytic field because they are both narrative practices which explore the 'constraints of self-becoming'.⁷ In my practice, I have established an enduring interest in the work of the paediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott who was an early proponent of what became the broad field of relational psychoanalysis. In his writings Winnicott addresses the centrality of creativity, play, culture and imagination in self-becoming from infancy onwards.⁸ Throughout this reflective manuscript I am going to draw from relational psychoanalytic writings because in them I find a concern with character common to literature and a vocabulary with which to speak about my subjectivity in relation to the practice of writing characters.

I want to return to the grey bars covering the eyes and mouth of the man cycling as a condition of writing with implications for this practice-led thesis. In his essay *Not-Knowing* the writer Donald Barthelme describes and enacts the centrality of not-knowing when writing. He begins to write two characters, Jacqueline and Jemima, in order to demonstrate how not-knowing operates:

Jacqueline and Jemima have just failed the Graduate Record Examination and are cursing God in colourful Sarah Lawrence language. What happens next? Of course, I don't know.

It's appropriate to pause and say that the writer is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do.⁹

4. EVAN S. CONNELL, *Mrs Bridge* (London: Penguin, 2012).

5. FERNANDO PESSOA, *The Book of Disquiet*, ed. Maria José de Lancastre, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991).

6. ARISTOTLE, *The Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Classics, 1996).

7. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Promises, Promises', *Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 375.

8. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971).

9. DONALD BARTHELME, 'Not-Knowing', *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme*, ed. Kim Herzinger (New York: Random House, 1997), 11.

The not-knowing is crucial to art, is what permits art to be made. Without the scanning process engendered by not-knowing, without the possibility of having the mind move in unanticipated directions, there would be no invention. This is not to say that I don't know anything about Jacqueline or Jemima, but what I do know comes into being at the instant it's inscribed.¹⁰

Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how. We have all heard novelists testify to the fact that, beginning a new book, they are utterly baffled as to how to proceed, what should be written and how it might be written, even though they've done a dozen. At best there's a slender intuition, not much greater than an itch. The anxiety attached to this situation is not inconsiderable.¹¹

These observations chime with my experiences of writing, specifically writing characters. Writing is immersive but at the start of a new work the uncertainty of what to put on the page is accompanied by a tolerable amount of tension. My approach to the condition of not-knowing has been to maintain daily praxis, to protect this immersive, imaginative space and to 'Just get on with it!'

The surrealist writer Francis Ponge, known for his prose poems evoking the character of quotidian things, lists his 'personal mechanisms' of writing:

The first consists of placing the chosen object (explain how duly chosen) in the center of the world, that is, in the center of my "concerns"; opening a particular trap door in my mind, and thinking about it naively and fervently (lovingly).¹²

There are as many 'personal mechanisms' for dealing with not-knowing as there are practitioners. Within the context of practice-led, performative research the not-knowing needs addressing using a bespoke language. In Jane Goodall's essay about the relationship between research and writing in her popular novels, she vividly describes her practice as an 'engine room'¹³ where research appears in many guises. She makes a distinction between research as finding out, for example, finding out how a historical character might dress and research which acknowledges the not-knowing of writing. She cites the way Norman Mailer's *The Spooky Art*¹⁴ exposes the challenges of writing, Goodall concludes :

10. DONALD BARTHELME, 'Not-Knowing', *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme*, ed. Kim Herzinger (New York: Random House, 1997), 12.

11. Ibid.

12. FRANCIS PONGE, *The Voice of Things*, trans. Beth Archer (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 100.

13. JANE GOODALL, 'Nightmares in the Engine Room', *Practice-led Research, Research-led practice in the Creative Arts*, eds. Hazel Smith, Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: EUP, 2011), 206.

14. Ibid. 205.

With some help from my guides, then, I've been learning that the spooky art of fiction writing involves a commitment to improvisation and randomness, a submission to the erasure of authorial design, a readiness to be mesmerised by place and possessed by psychological energies from competing directions.¹⁵

Research in the context of the creative arts can actually serve to calibrate awareness of the psychological displacements required to keep the work alive and manage its energies.¹⁶

She warns of the risk of sabotaging the relationship between the writer and their work by using a research-led approach before composition. She suggests analysis might help address nightmares in the engine room but composing is an unpredictable improvised and immersive process that must come first.¹⁷ Goodall's insights have been echoed outside the realm of the arts by Donald Schön who acknowledged uncertainty and instability as qualities of reflective practice.¹⁸

The implications of 'not-knowing' as a precondition for my doctoral research are structural. As outlined earlier, the cycle of writing, reading, writing I propose is going to be divided over three years: in year one I will write characters, in year two I will critically reflect on the characters written and in the final year I will return to writing characters. This structure takes heed of Goodall's warning and protects compositional processes, *after* I disengage from composition I will enter a period of intensive critical reading.

To conclude, I want to situate my premise of practice within a wider discourse on performative research and practice-led strategies. In 2003, Brad C. Haseman coined the term 'performative research'¹⁹ to describe a new category of research additional to qualitative and quantitative. In his *Manifesto for Performative Research* he synthesises J. L. Austin's concept of 'performative speech acts'²⁰ to propose that:

[...] performative research represents a move which holds that practice is the principal research activity – rather than *only* the practice of performance – and sees the material outcomes of practice as all-important representations of research findings in their own right.²¹

15. JANE GOODALL, 'Nightmares in the Engine Room', *Practice-led Research, Research-led practice in the Creative Arts*, eds. Hazel Smith, Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: EUP, 2011), 207.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. 200.

18. DONALD A. SCHÖN, *The reflective practitioner – how professionals think in action*, [online PDF], <<http://www.sopper.dk/speciale/arkiv/book49.pdf>>, accessed 7 Aug. 2016, 2–4.

19. BRAD C. HASEMAN, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research" (no. 118, 2006), (online PDF), QUT eprints, <<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3999/>>, accessed 6 Aug. 2016, 5.

20. Ibid. 5–6.

21. BRAD C. HASEMAN, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International*

Haseman identifies practice-led research strategies as the foundation of performative research citing Carole Gray's definition of practice-led as:

[...] firstly research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.²²

I am beginning this doctoral research with the explicit aim of using practice-led strategies as described by Gray. I will work with methods familiar to me as a practitioner and I am initiating the research *in* practice during the first year of my candidature. I am going to use this essay *The Premise of Practice* and the following essay *The Premise of Character* as dual departure points for my research. This performative, practice-led research is going to harness the momentum of praxis to generate new knowledge on route to making characters *and* in the form of characters.

At the start of this essay I quoted from the first two pages of Ali Smith's novel *There but for the*.²³ The first few pages function like a prologue to the main body of her novel. This vignette of a man cycling on the spot in a room invites you to read with this metaphorical scene in mind. Smith's vignette is nested within this essay to achieve the same ends: to evoke aspects of practice, my practice, as the first half of a departure point for this research.

Australia incorporating Culture and Policy, theme issue "Practice-led Research" (no. 118, 2006), (online PDF), QUT eprints, <<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3999/>>, accessed 6 Aug. 2016, 7.

22. Ibid. 8.

23. ALI SMITH, *There but for the* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. xi–xii.

2. The Premise of Character

Being misrepresented is simply being presented with a version of ourselves – an invention – that we cannot agree with. But we are daunted by other people making us up, by the number of people we seem to be. We become frantic trying to keep the numbers down, trying to keep the true story of who we really are in circulation. This, perhaps more than anything else, drives us into the arms of one special partner. Monogamy is a way of getting the versions of ourselves down to a minimum.

Adam Phillips, *Monogamy*

A stranger enters a room. How do we immediately begin to take his measure?

James Wood, *How Fiction Works*

If in the everyday we make each other up, what is distinctive about literary characters? When we talk about a literary character, we are talking about an entity configured as words but made through the act of reading.¹ When we talk about a person's character we are talking about what makes someone distinctive but, more often than not, character becomes something enduring, the stable qualities we recognise. I am going to use relational psychoanalytic writings to propose that 'character' in both contexts *is* fictional. This is what I will refer to as a 'relational' concept of character. Unlike the concept of self, 'which is *in* a person and is really and intrinsically he',² I propose that character is observed by others. Therefore being a character involves being in a relationship with someone who is making you up. Following on from this proposal, I will argue that a 'relational' concept of character is a critique of the extent to which we can claim to know each other. And that this critique can operate when writing and reading characters. In this relationally informed premise character becomes more kinetic, contingent and multiplicitous, not something easily known. Once established, I will use this premise of character as a departure point for writing characters, effectively transporting a relational concept of character into praxis.

The premise of character I am working with is a relational one informed by the Phillips quotation above: characters are 'inventions' we may or may not agree with. I am going to take a step further and argue that character *is* fiction both in literature and in life. These fictions manifest the politics of representation: character is intrinsically

1. STANLEY E. FISH, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics*', *Reader-Response: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (8th edn., Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1994), 70–100.

2. CHARLES RYCROFT, *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. 'self' (2nd edn., London: Penguin, 1995), 165.

linked with the processes of representation, identity, power and culture.³

The American art critic Craig Owens confronted the unresolvable conflict between representation within the realm of aesthetics and representation within the realm of politics. His critique of representations of marginalised people: women, homosexuals and ethnic groups attacked, ‘...any claim that representations are politically *representative* of those who they purport to represent.’⁴ Owens exposed how marginalised groups are oppressed and silenced through representation itself – the formation of intractable character in life and literature has the same problematics: to disempower by representing an ‘other’.

I want to approach fictional writing as a critical venture: one in which characters are made up and the process of making them up can also be made up. One in which the oscillating affects of imagining and inventing characters can be rendered, felt and critiqued. Where the conflicts between the political and aesthetic realms, identified by Owens, and the interpersonal tensions around making characters up remain unresolvable.

I am going to begin by outlining the history which has led to the broad school of relational psychoanalysis. Between 1942 and 1944 the Controversial Discussions split the British Psycho-Analytical Society into two distinct camps establishing key differences between classical Freudian and Kleinian theory.⁵ In these discussions Melanie Klein, an early practitioner of child analysis, shifted the emphasis away from Freud’s instincts as the root of neurosis to the infant’s first year of life, especially the relationship between the infant and the mother.⁶ Out of this split a third Independent Group of dissenting voices formed including the paediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott. The Independent Group incubated ideas which were consolidated in the 1970s as Object-relations theory: ‘Psychoanalytic theory in which the subject’s need to relate to objects occupies the central position; in contrast to instinct theory, which centres around the subject’s need to reduce instinctual tensions.’⁷ By the 1950s, post Controversial Discussions, Winnicott was articulating key concepts which still inform relational psychoanalytic writing.⁸ The ‘transitional object’⁹ (exemplified through the

3. CRAIG OWENS, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, eds. Craig Owens, Scott Stewart Bryson (Berkeley: UCP, 1994).

4. SIMON WATNEY, ‘Craig Owens: “The Indignity of Speaking for Others”’, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, eds. Craig Owens, Scott Stewart Bryson (Berkeley: UCP, 1994), p. x.

5. CHARLES RYCROFT, *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. ‘controversial discussions’ (2nd edn., London: Penguin, 1995), 27–28.

6. Ibid. 90–91.

7. Ibid. 114.

8. JAN ABRAM, *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott’s Use of Words* (2nd edn., London: Karnac, 2007), 363–399.

9. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971), 1–10.

comfort blanket), the ‘potential space’¹⁰ (the site of imagination, creativity and culture) and the centrality of play in child development¹¹ (as a mechanism of expression and self creation) were consolidated by 1971 in *Playing and Reality*. These concepts heralded an environmental and relational approach to psychoanalysis. I now want to cite writing by three psychoanalysts who have drawn on Winnicott to articulate relational ideas of character: Christopher Bollas, Adam Phillips and Leo Bersani.

In *Being a Character* Christopher Bollas begins by describing the ways we imbue objects with our subjectivity and vice versa. He writes:

For without giving it much thought at all we consecrate the world with our own subjectivity, investing people, places, things and events with a kind of idiomatic significance. As we inhabit this world of ours, we amble about in a field of pregnant objects that contribute to the dense psychic textures that constitute self experience. Very often we select and use objects in ways unconsciously intended to bring up such imprints; indeed, we do this many times each day, sort of thinking ourself out, by evoking constellations of inner experience. At the same time, however, the people, things, and even events of our world simply happen to us, and when they do, we are called into differing forms of being by chance.¹²

Bollas proposes that we all live amidst ‘evocative objects’ which yield dense experiences, ‘Some objects (a book, a friend, a concert, a walk) release us into intense inner experiencings which somehow emphasize us.’¹³ Here he uses Winnicott’s concept of intermediate space (also known as potential space¹⁴) to articulate where this charge exists, ‘[...] in the place where subject meets thing, to confer significance in the very moment that being is transformed by the object. The objects of intermediate space are compromise formations between the subject’s state of mind and the thing’s character.’¹⁵ What Bollas identifies are the specific ways in which evocative objects affect us: sensorially, structurally, conceptually, symbolically, mnemically, projectively.¹⁶ This is the groundwork of the self onto which he begins to build a concept of character.

With the expression of the self, Bollas argues, character appears. Bollas uses the word ‘idiom’ to refer to ‘a unique psychic organization’ we are born with that

10. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971). 176–84.

11. Ibid. 44–45.

12. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3–4.

13. Ibid. 29.

14. JAN ABRAM, *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott’s Use of Words* (2nd edn., London: Karnac, 2007), 337.

15. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2003), 18.

16. Ibid. 34.

constitutes the core of the self.¹⁷ Here he describes the expression of idiom by an individual:

To be a character, to release one's idiom into lived experience, requires a certain risk, as the subject will not know his outcome; indeed, to be a character is to be released into being, not as a knowable entity per se, but as an idiom of expression explicating a human form. Even in these moments of self expression the individual will not know his own meaning, his reflections will always lag behind himself, more often than not puzzled by his itness, yet relieved by the *jouissance* of its choosings.¹⁸

Bollas proposes a delay or disconnect between the individual's expressive gestures and reflections on them. The quotation suggests character is: figurative, of the world and yet obfuscated from one's self. Bollas then goes on to introduce a 'witness' into this scenario who observes the 'expressive individual':

Do I know the other's character, who the other truly is? Have I the means of transcribing the other's subjectivity to some collectable place? Only to a limited, if useful, extent, as we shall see. But we can observe an individual's personal effects and to some extent witness the idiom's lexical expressions implied by object choice even if what we see is more like a jumbled collection of manifest texts.¹⁹

Here Bollas exchanges *knowing* the other's character for *observing* a jumble of 'personal effects' and 'manifest texts'. There is a double estrangement at work: first, the expressive individual cannot apprehend their own character and second, from the perspective of the witness an individual's personal effects may be observed but their expressive self is obscured. The expressive individual has a limited vision of their own character but the witness can see the other's personal effects and collect them into the form of a character. Perhaps, in a favourable relationship, the expressive individual might glimpse their own character reflected back to them through their witness, as through a mirror. Hence, character becomes a relational concept – relationships sponsor characters.

Bollas offers the visual metaphor of an empty room inhabited by a ghost: the ghost is a person's idiom and the things in the room are their personal effects. The witness sees the personal effects mysteriously move around the room, manipulated by the invisible hand of the ghost. As the room is arranged and rearranged character accretes,

17. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2003), 51.

18. Ibid. 54.

19. Ibid.

these arrangements are character. Bollas concludes:

By seeing the objects move, rather like observing the wind by watching the moving trees, we would, in effect, be watching his personal effect as he passed through his life, and theoretically, we could film subjectivities' enacted dissemination by catching the movement of objects over time.

This metaphor enables me to get closer to what I want to say about the nature of human character. It allows us to consider the forms of existence selected by any human life, sculpted through the choice and use of objects, but unencumbered by the imposing physical presence of the subject who seems to be self defining in and through his own presence. The ghost moving about the room does not, however, indicate the most important place of the moving object, as we are not witness to those internal objects conjured in the mind.²⁰

Because we exist in separate bodies we are able to observe an other in a way we cannot observe our self. Character is a sequence of temporary arrangements, visible gestures and traces exterior to the witness and the expressive self unfolding in the 'potential space'²¹ between us. Over time character takes on the plurality of 'subjectivities'.

The second half of *Being a Character* contains case studies in which Bollas explores what use his concept of character might be within psychoanalysis. In a study titled *Violent Innocence* he returns to Winnicott's formulation of the immersion of creative play²² to redescribe what happens between people in terms of illusion. Bollas writes, 'The idea that we understand one another through the different orders of communication is, in my view, largely illusory.'²³ He pauses to cite the literary critic Harold Bloom's proposition that creative misperception is a generative force in literature and Norman N. Holland's reader-response research into ordinary readers' perceptions of literary works.²⁴ Bollas concludes:

Because we do not comprehend one another (in the discreet, momentous conveying of the contents of our internal world) we are therefore free to invent one another. We change one another. We create and re-create, form and break our "senses" or "understandings" of one another, secured from anxiety or despair by the illusion of understanding and yet freed by its impossibility to imagine one another.²⁵

[...] if the illusion of understanding prevails, we are lulled into countless creative, subjectively determined misrecognitions of one another in the interest of deep play.²⁶

20. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2003), 55.

21. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971), 126.

22. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, 'Violent Innocence', *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2003), 185.

23. Ibid. 186.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid. 187.

In Bollas' narrative character is sponsored by an illusion of understanding. When this illusion breaks down we accuse each other of 'acting out of character' but when the illusion is sustained we are free to make each other up.

I now want to build on Bollas' relational concept of character to propose that character *is* fiction, in life and literature. The cultural critic Raymond Williams locates a tension in the English origins of the word 'fiction' between the imaginative and the invented, 'It [fiction] was introduced in C14 from fw *fiction*, F, *fictionem*, L, from rw *fingere*, L – to fashion or form; the same root produced *feign*, which had the sense of invent falsely or deceptively from C13.'²⁷ As Bollas states, making up each other's characters involves creativity and imagination and is only possible because our limited comprehension of the other opens up space where invention can happen. Hence, character *is* fiction. Character is the invention we make when we relate to each other and when we read of the figurative gestures in a book.

In life character *is* fiction: an illusion of understanding allows us to transform someone's personal effects into their character. In literature character *is* fiction: an immersion in reading allows us to transform words on a page into a character. Free indirect style, point of view, dialogue, detail, narration²⁸ serve a similar purpose in the creation of character by a reader as physical and emotional proximity and distance do in the creation of character in real life.

Bollas' 'relational' concept of character is most confluent with the literary discourse of reader-response criticism because here the approach embraces the subjectivity and creativity of readers. Reader-response criticism was consolidated in the 1980s²⁹ but its principles were outlined earlier in 1938 by Louise M. Rosenblatt in her seminal study *Literature as Exploration*.³⁰ For Rosenblatt reading was a re-creation of a text:

Every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense created anew. *Fundamentally, the process of understanding a work implies a re-creation of it, an attempt to grasp completely the structured sensations and concepts through which the author seeks to convey the quality of his sense of life. Each must make a new synthesis of these elements with his own nature, but it is essential that he evoke those components of experience to which the text actually refers.*³¹

Reader-response criticism sees readers as sites of literature and literature as a

27. RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, s.v. 'fiction' (London: Fontana Press, 1988), 134–135.

28. JAMES WOOD, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage Books, 2009).

29. JANE P. TOMPKINS ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1994).

30. LOUISE M. ROSENBLATT, *Literature as Exploration* (4th edn., New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1983).

31. *Ibid.* 113.

performative event. Stanley E. Fish, one of its key proponents, writes, 'It [a sentence] is no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an event that happens to, and with the participation of the reader.'³² By 1980 Wolfgang Iser, another reader-response critic, had elaborated a nuanced account of immersion in reading that removes the 'subject-object division that constitutes all perception'.³³ This conception of reading is very close to Winnicott's 'essential paradox' which proposes a 'conception-perception gap' where imagination and creativity reside.³⁴ Finally, the aforementioned Norman N. Holland, who worked between the fields of psychoanalysis and reader-response criticism, proposed that readers build their identity using literature. He writes, '[...] all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolise and finally to replicate ourselves'.³⁵ Holland brings us full circle back to Bollas: books and the characters they conjure become 'evocative objects'.

I want to build on an established affinity between psychoanalysis and reader-response criticism to consider how character in literature critiques our claims to 'know' each other. Character is fiction but when reading from the page a character becomes a fiction that also critiques illusions of understanding. In literature (as argued by reader-response criticism) the oscillations of proximity to and distance from a character (between reader and character) unfold in a reader. A reader has perhaps chosen the book as an 'evocative object' but finally, and ultimately, they are alone in a reflective space created by reading, not in the presence of another person. The psychoanalyst and literary critic Adam Phillips articulates this unique aloneness of reading, 'The author speaks to you, but doesn't answer back. The author, in actuality, never speaks at all. And the demand of this person called an author seems chosen, based on a feeling of affinity.'³⁶ In another essay from the same collection Phillips describes psychoanalysis as a form of translation where there is no original text. He concludes, 'In other words, when we set out to translate a person – to translate a text that doesn't exist – we have to make it up as we go along. But we have to make it up together.'³⁷ When we read we

32. STANLEY E. FISH, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics*', *Reader-Response: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (8th edn., Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1994), 72.

33. WOLFGANG ISER, 'The Reading Process', *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (8th edn., Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1994), 67.

34. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971), 177.

35. NORMAN N. HOLLAND, 'Unity Identity Text Self', *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (8th edn., Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1994), 125.

36. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Promises, Promises', *Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 373.

37. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'On Translating a Person', *Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 147.

are alone but when we relate, in psychoanalysis or elsewhere, the stakes are higher.

Understanding each other in life is an illusion which creates character – a necessary illusion that forms relationships, which in turn sustain us emotionally and physically. However, in literature the illusion necessary to sponsor a character in a reader is immersive but not sustaining in the same way – abandoning a book doesn't have the same consequences as abandoning a person. This prosaic difference allows literary character to operate as a critique of claims to know each other. In life claiming to not understand someone frustrates rather than facilitates relating. Whereas a critical awareness exists between a literary character and their reader. The distance from or proximity to a character is scored by the writer as text and performed by reading. The illusion of understanding a literary character can oscillate, drawing a reader into a more or less critical relationship with the figments of their imagination, and their own creative process. Reading opens up safe self-reflective space, whereas relating in everyday life is a more risky, visceral expedition.

I now want to connect the illusion of understanding each other, described by Bollas, with a enduring scepticism about 'knowing' each other elucidated in several essays by Adam Phillips. Phillips has a dual practice as an analyst and essayist. He is central to this thesis because he writes about psychoanalysis from a literary perspective and literature from a psychoanalytic perspective. He has previously written in response to Bollas' concept of character³⁸ and like Bollas he draws upon Winnicott.³⁹ For Phillips there has been a growing suspicion that psychoanalysis as a praxis, and a body of writing, is too knowing and that 'knowing' each other may be a coercion and a collusion. This critique of knowing began with *Terrors and Experts*⁴⁰ as a questioning of the authority of psychoanalysts and was most recently re-articulated in the essay *On Not Getting It*.⁴¹ Here he starts with getting and not getting jokes then goes on to examine the complicity and exclusivity of social groups. Language becomes central to his argument as a means through which understanding is established and fractured between people. He argues that in life and in literature we speak to each other and read in order to find an illusion of understanding *and* to provoke more arresting, critical experiences.⁴² Then he makes a striking observation about literature which I want to build on, he writes:

38. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Futures', *On Flirtation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 154–164.

And in LEO BERSANI, ADAM PHILLIPS, *Intimacies* (Chicago: CUP, 2008), 113.

39. ADAM PHILLIPS, *Winnicott* (London: Penguin, 2007).

40. ADAM PHILLIPS, *Terrors and Experts* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

41. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'On Not Getting It', *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 34–80.

42. *Ibid.* 59.

But it is the linguistic arts that seem at once hospitable to the notion of intelligibility, and in which intelligibility can be put into more or less intelligible question.⁴³

Here there is a sense that reading is synonymous with understanding, as the literary critic William H. Gass states, ‘to know is to possess words’.⁴⁴ But what Phillips notices is that literature (or the literary arts) can also be highly reflexive about their intelligibility.

Illusions of understanding and reflexivity exist concurrently and this is what challenges our mechanisms of getting to know a character as we read. Literary character operates as a critique of ‘knowing others’ because when reading immersion *and* reflexivity happen at once. A reader invents a character but the inventing is dependent on how the text choreographs that unfolding in a reader. No reading experience is completely immersive, a reader is always moving back and forth between the page and their invention. In her book of aporias *Nilling*, the poet and essayist Lisa Robertson describes this oscillating of attention as her desired reading experience:

Sometimes my sadness in reading is that I can’t stay. I fall away from the ability to receive. So that the life-long work of reading is the process of situating and elaborating within myself techniques that might guide or permit the lengthening duration and affective expansion of my receptive capacity. Within reading I desire lastingness in tandem with the falling away.⁴⁵

As a reader’s proximity to and distance from a character oscillates knowing the character is forestalled, their invention becomes unstable, multiplies, reconfigures – the character is not to be *known* but to be *reflected upon*. The art critic and writer Jan Verwoert reframes the tension between immersion and critical reflection when reading in vivid moral terms:

If we do read on, it’s because we feel safe to assume that we won’t be fooled. The reasons for this aren’t rational, but structural. The act of reading itself both produces and requires a moment of unconditional intimacy. Without it, the immersive concentration that brings written letters to life would literally be impossible. The default fallacy built into the act of reading—the fallacy that permits writers to trick their readers into trusting them—lies then in the fact that the moment of mental intimacy immanent to an immersion in text is practically

43. ADAM PHILLIPS, ‘On Not Getting It’, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 59.

44. WILLIAM H. GASS, ‘On Talking to Oneself’, *Habitations of the Word: Essays* (New York: Touchstone, 1986), 207.

45. LISA ROBERTSON, ‘Lastingness: Réage, Lucrèce, Arendt’, *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, The Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias* (Toronto: BookThug, 2012), 26.

indistinguishable from an experience of personal honesty. Reading feels honest.⁴⁶

I have proposed a relational concept of character and identified the confluence between this concept and reader-response criticism. The concept asserts that character *is* fiction, that literary character *is* a critique of the extent to which we can claim to know each other and that the invention and reinvention of characters, both on and off the page, requires an illusion of understanding that is either sponsored by relationships or reading. The associated question of what constitutes intimacy, raised by Verwoert, is infinitely complex if we cannot really claim to know each other.

In a slim volume of short essays titled *Intimacies* by the psychoanalyst and writer Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, both write in response to each other emulating a conversation.⁴⁷ Throughout the book they reference, acknowledge and critique each others' writings slowly building a concept of 'impersonal intimacy'. This concept is founded on a kind of narcissism for two and is presented in opposition to the acquisition of knowledge of the other. Their conversation explores what happens when the self is undefended by character⁴⁸ and questions whether the self is in need of reification and defence.⁴⁹ What is at stake in the relational concept of character proposed in this premise is a covert critique of fixed ideas of self, and character as ballast against 'unpredicted life' and an 'an unknowable future'.⁵⁰

In the last two essays I have outlined a premise for practice and a premise for character. These dual departure points are offered in parallel. Now I will 'dive in'⁵¹ and write.

46. JAN VERWOERT, 'All Writers Are Liars', *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, ed. Vanessa Ohlraun (Berlin: Sternberg, 2010), 74.

47. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Preface' in LEO BERSANI and ADAM PHILLIPS, *Intimacies* (Chicago: CUP, 2008).

48. LEO BERSANI, 'The It in the I' in LEO BERSANI and ADAM PHILLIPS *Intimacies* (Chicago: CUP, 2008), 24–25.

49. Ibid. 97.

50. Ibid. p. viii.

51. BRAD C. HASEMAN, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research" (no. 118, 2006) (online PDF), QUT eprints, <<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3999/>>, accessed 6 Aug. 2016, 4.

Part I

You are of vital importance

You are invited to read the book *You are of vital importance*.

Part II

3. Turning a writer into a reader, then back into a writer again

I want to constitute myself (the writer) as a critical reader of my own work (*You are of vital importance*). This reading will be an intensive, reflective act seeking to apprehend how three characters featured in *You are of vital importance*: Emmet, Mark and You are made up on the page and were made up in the writing process. This reading will use a methodology which aims to generate further character studies in the final year of my PhD.

Before introducing my proposed methods, I want to consider what reading for praxis might involve. In her essay *The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response*, the literary critic Jane Tompkins traces the dominant modes of reader-response from the classical period up to the 1980s.¹ She uses an ancient work *On the Sublime* by Longinus to demonstrate an approach to reading which sought the elucidation of rhetoric, technique and praxis.² Tompkins writes:

A modern critic, in short, would describe the reader's experience in such a way as to provide the basis for an interpretation of the work. But Longinus quotes the passage for an entirely different reason. He wishes to demonstrate that direct address effectively draws the reader into the scene of the action. He has no interest in the meaning of the passage, and indeed, it is doubtful that he would recognize "meaning" as a critical issue at all. For if the reader has become part of the action, is caught up by the language, the question of what the passage "means" does not arise. Once the desired effect has been achieved, there is no need, or room, for interpretation.³

Here reading for praxis involves working out rhetorical techniques in order to harness the power of language and to reflect on the ethics of using this power;⁴ interpretation is firmly out of the picture.

I now want to connect Tompkin's observations with an essay by the writer and art critic Susan Sontag. In *Against Interpretation*⁵ she traces the separation of form and content in the arts back to Plato, Aristotle and mimetic theories of art. She argues that after the Enlightenment eclipsed classical texts, a search for their lost meanings takes the form of relentless interpretation with the explicit aim of securing cultural

1. JANE P. TOMPKINS ed. 'The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response', *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (8th edn., Baltimore: John Hopkins University), 201–226.

2. Ibid. 202–203.

3. Ibid. 203.

4. Ibid. 226.

5. SUSAN SONTAG, 'Against Interpretation', *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 4.

foundations. Then later, what a work is ‘about’ becomes increasingly complex after Marx and Freud establish ‘elaborate systems of hermeneutics’: Sontag asserts, ‘To understand is to interpret.’⁶ Sontag builds a persuasive argument against reductive, reactionary methods of interpretation in the critical discourses around literature, film and art. She writes:

In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.

Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of “meanings.” It is to turn the world into this world. (“This world”! As if there were any other.)

The world, our world, is depleted, impoverished enough. Away with all duplicates of it, until we again experience more immediately what we have.⁷

Sontag goes on to propose a return to a fuller more sensory apprehension of artworks. She concludes:

Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.

The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art—and, by analogy, our own experience—more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is, even that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*.⁸

I want to triangulate Tompkins and Sontag’s assertions with observations by Adam Phillips on redescription as a process.

Phillips has attempted to avoid making meaning in the praxis of psychoanalysis and literary criticism by replacing interpretation with redescription. Phillips, like Sontag, is suspicious of meaning, he writes, ‘Meaning is imposed wherever experience is disturbing[...].’⁹ In his collection of essays on the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis *Promises Promises*, Phillips introduces redescription:

I think the most useful general way of formulating what psychoanalysis is, is simply to say that it is an art of redescription. As Bion, the British analyst, once said, the analyst and the patient are trying to find stories for the inappropriate. A fresh account of the unacceptable is required.¹⁰

6. SUSAN SONTAG, ‘Against Interpretation’, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 7.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid. 14.

9. ADAM PHILLIPS, ‘On Not Getting It’, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 44.

10. ADAM PHILLIPS, ‘On Translating a Person’, *Promises Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 131.

In his later essay *On Not Getting It*, Phillips returns to redescription presenting it as an expansive process that is forward looking:

What psychoanalysis and literary criticism have in common, at its most minimal, is the wish to give an account of something, to add on something of value to what is already there, to redescribe something with a view to a preferred future. 'Rhetorical terms,' the literary critic Barbara Johnson writes in *Persons and Things*, 'aid in the expression of desire; no one seeks new ways to say what is not desired.'¹¹

It is this generative sense of redescription I am interested in as a means of both critically reading *and* generating more character studies. As Rosenblatt suggests reading is re-creation¹² so I will use a method of redescription to render this process. I do not want to pursue the meaning of the three studies I have selected, nor do I want to interpret them or my process of writing them. Instead of evaluating the studies I want to redescribe them and then use this redescription to build momentum towards writing in the final year of my PhD.

So is reading for praxis, as outlined so far, compatible with critical reading? And can I critically read my own work? Writing *You are of vital importance* involved a continuous reading of my writing; and the re-reading which redrafting and editing involves. How is this different from constituting myself as a reader after the publication of a work? I want to make a distinction between making a character up by putting words *on* a page and making a character up by reading words *off* a page. Both happen when writing but the aim of reading when in the flow of composition is different from reading after disengagement from a work. In her essay *Nightmares in the Engine Room*, Jane Goodall concludes, 'Analysis cannot produce a story,' she suggests writing involves a willingness to be 'mesmerised', 'possessed', immersed in a process.¹³ As mentioned earlier, I wanted to avoid being analytical when composing, to protect my immersive process. Hence, I have divided my doctorate research into a cycle of three phases over three years: writing, reading, writing, separating composition from reflection. The artist and educator, Sister Corita Kent, wrote ten invaluable rules for the Immaculate Heart College Art Department where she taught from 1967–1968. Rule 8 states, 'Don't try to create and analyse at the same time. They're different processes.'¹⁴

11. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'On Not Getting It', *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 80.

12. see Ch. 2, n. 31.

13. JANE GOODALL, 'Nightmares in the Engine Room', *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, eds. Hazel Smith, Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: EUP, 2011), 207.

14. SISTER CORITA KENT, *Immaculate Heart College Art Department Rules*, [online shop] <<https://corita.myshopify.com/products/small-postcards>>, accessed 1 July 2013.

Having finished writing *You are of vital importance* I felt distant from the work. And after the book's publication, with the words reified as ink on a page, the distance is greater. Writers often comment on the peculiar sensation of feeling outside a work after its completion. The writer Monique Wittig articulates this position of the writer reconfigured as reader-as-critic years after completing work on her novel *Les guérillères*:

In the movement of revisiting a text on which I will not work any more I situate myself in what I call the critic's point of view, the point of view of afterwards. But this critical point of view is not completely the same as that of the critic who hasn't written the book. For it shares after the fact the point of view of before, when there was only the blank page. And therefore the writer's is a double critical movement: when s/he writes s/he is in the before working the material, sometimes cut off apparently from everything, facing the unknown, but from time to time in the course of the work emerging to bring a critical look at what s/he is in the process of doing, a look of afterwards. It's a sort of back and forth that is difficult to keep track of except for those who keep notebooks. Then after the book has reached a limit of work, when it is published, when it is discussed, in short the writer no longer completely disposes of the text, but can look at it with this double critical movement, this time backwards.¹⁵

In the essay Wittig writes on *Les guérillères* she seamlessly moves from making observations on syntax, to reflecting on praxis, noting her influences and remembering how the novel was written. Here she talks about working with fragments:

The constitutive element is the pronoun, the plural personal pronoun of the third person, **elles**. It is utilized like a character. Ordinarily, a character of a novel represents a singular entity. But here from the start a collective entity developed in the literary workshop and took over all the space of the narrative. The form that this **elles** imposed was for a longtime linear in my work although it was composed of fragments. And this first series of fragments fell out at the time of the last montage of *Les guérillères*. It's what I call a parasite text.¹⁶

Before the book took on the aspect it now has, I literally had to spread out all the cut-up fragments of the text on the floor and give myself up to a pitiless montage during which I almost, once again, lost it. That's when the above-mentioned parasite text fell out (it was published later under the title "Une partie de campagne" in the journal *Commerce*). Everything fell into place after this surgical operation.¹⁷

Wittig uses this double critical movement to find a bespoke vocabulary for her process: the 'parasite text', and to describe the illusion of a character writing the

15. MONIQUE WITTIG, 'Some Remarks on *Les guérillères*', *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, Namascar Shaktini ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2005), 37.

16. Ibid. 38.

17. Ibid. 42.

text: the collective entity **elles** ‘took over all the space of the narrative’.¹⁸ The critical distance Wittig had from *Les guérillères* has to be mapped onto the timeline of her practice. She published her novel in 1969 and *Some Remarks on Les guérillères* was published in 1994, 25 years has elapsed. This is also the case with Thomas Pynchon’s introduction to *Slow Learner*, his collection of early short stories, in which he reflects critically on his writing process 20 years after the stories were first published.¹⁹ I am going to adapt Wittig’s ‘double critical movement’ into a method of critical reflection. I acknowledge that this reflection takes place within the elongated timeline of my practice and the duration of my doctoral candidature. The hindsight of years does enhance critical distance from a work but the purpose of reading *You are of vital importance* is ultimately to enact a critical reading method which builds momentum for further character studies. The method not the delay will constitute criticality.

I am going to enact a method of reading *You are of vital importance* that adds structure to Wittig’s ‘double critical movement’ and uses redescription as a forward-looking mode of critical writing. This method will consist of three distinct steps that will sift and separate the ‘afterwards’ point of view (critic’s perspective) from the ‘before’ point of view (process of writing) and then make space at the end for notations towards new character studies.

The three steps of this method are: redescriving the published study, redescriving the process of writing the study and then making notes towards a forthcoming character study. I have selected *Emmet, Mark* and *You are of vital importance to the art community* as strong examples of character studies and the three steps will be applied to each study in turn. I will now outline the three steps which together are a method of constituting myself as a reader of these studies.

Step One: I will redescribe each published study in an essay written in the present tense. I will write these essays from a reader-response perspective, in as much as I will discount the neutrality of the critic (me) and will, as the reader-response critic Stanley E. Fish proposes substitute ‘the question – what does this sentence mean? – [with] another, more operational question – what does this sentence do?’²⁰ I will progressively read each study annotating directly onto the printed page to capture the immediacy of my responses to the printed words. I do not know what form these annotations will take until I make them. When editing, I do not use standardised proofreader’s

18. MONIQUE WITTIG, ‘Some Remarks on Les guérillères’, *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, Namascar Shaktini ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2005), 39.

19. THOMAS PYNCHON, *Slow Learner: Early Stories* (London: Vintage, 1995).

20. STANLEY E. FISH, ‘Literature in the Reader’, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (8th edn., Baltimore: The John Hopkins University, 1994), 72.

marks, I make marks that register my thoughts easily and quickly. I will continue with this bespoke annotation inspired by the diversity of annotated pages from authors' manuscripts reproduced in *The Paris Review* interviews.²¹ I want to respond to the typeset, printed words on the published page, not to reassert the objectivity of the text, but simply to apprehend my own works anew. To use the fixivity of ink not to construct an objectivity but a new subjectivity: a subjectivity that belongs to me, the writer, post publication. I will then redescribe these responses in essays.

This redescription will take the form of a literary essay. The essay being, from the nineteenth century onwards, the form which allowed for digression, exploration and reflexive thinking.²² In John D'Agata's anthology of essays he proposes the potential of the essay as a personal alternative to non-fiction.²³ D'Agata cites the origin of the essay as a list of aphorisms by an author known as Ziusudra. D'Agata writes:

I think his [Ziusudra's] list is the beginning of an alternative to non-fiction, the beginning of a form that's not propelled by information, but one compelled instead by individual expression – by inquiry, by opinion, by wonder, by doubt. Ziusudra's list is the first essay in the world: it's a mind's inquisitive ramble through a place wiped clean of answers.²⁴

Step Two: I will redescribe the writing process of each published study in an essay written in the past tense. I am exorcising the writing process from the reading experience (Step One) in order to identify the second critical movement described by Wittig as 'point of view of before, where there was only the blank page'.²⁵ This movement is distinct because it is remembered and it is invisible to all other readers but it is of critical value within this generative methodology. I will describe what influenced the study, the process of composing, the techniques used and my shifting motivations from its inception to its completion. I anticipate crossovers between the materials that will inform my redescrptions and the materials which informed my writing processes since I am drawing on the same intellectual context (mine).

Step Three: I will make a bridge between my critical reading and the character studies I will make in the final year of my PhD. I will review my essays (Steps One and Two) and ask which bits have potential? Which parts could be built on? Which sentences are suggestive, forward looking? I will extend any small enthusiasms and

21. See Appendix A.

22. ADAM PHILLIPS, *Side Effects* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006), p. xiii.

23. JOHN D' AGATA, *The Lost Origins of the Essay* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2009), 1–7.

24. Ibid. 4.

25. MONIQUE WITTIG, 'Some Remarks on Les guérillères', *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, Namascar Shaktini ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2005), 37.

broaden the scope of interesting observations to address a potential character study – to move away from the specifics of the essays into a speculative tone.

In Step Three I will find momentum but refrain from prescribing new characters. I will make notes towards a future character study not forgetting Donald Barthelme's assertion, 'Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how.'²⁶ I will warm up for a new character by writing hopeful sentences. In David Markson's experimental novel *Reader's Block* a writer named 'Reader' speculates about writing a character called 'Protagonist' by recounting quotations, cultural and literary anecdotes and observations of the idiosyncrasies and tragedies of writers' and artists' lives. In Markson's novel 'Reader' seeks 'Protagonist' through a complex web of quotations and references.²⁷ Each page from *Reader's Block* is full of graphic gaps, these 'returns' of white space between anecdotes are where jumps of associative thinking can take place. Into these gaps step two characters: 'Reader' and 'Protagonist' who both inhabit Reader's imagination (see PLATE 1).

I will apply Markson's page layout and approach to my note making. Step Three is a space for speculation *on*, rather than consolidation *of*, Steps One and Two. These notes will gather observations and references that alight from the essays and provide a springboard for making. I will note themes, ideas and quotations emerging from the essays, I will identify but not attempt to synthesise them. The synthesis will be the character studies written in the final year of the PhD. These character studies will be the conclusion of the PhD thesis and the outcome of this method of constituting me as a critical reader.

In Chapter 1 (*The Premise of Character*), I discussed what a character study is in the context of this thesis. From the 62 pieces published as *You are of vital importance* I am selecting three clear examples of character studies to reflect on: *Emmet*, *Mark* and *You are of vital importance to the art community*. These studies represent the diversity and range of characters in the 62 pieces. All three studies oscillate the distance from and proximity to characters using very different combinations of orientation, person, access and perspective.²⁸

I have chosen *Emmet* because it is the most sustained character study. The central character named Emmet is written in relation to: his estranged girlfriend, an anonymous group of women he meets at a series of workshops and the workshop leaders. *Emmet* is written from a character orientated viewpoint, the narrator speaks in the third person

26. DONALD BARTHELEME, 'Not Knowing', *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme*, ed. Kim Herzinger (New York: Random House, 1997), 12.

27. DAVID MARKSON, *Reader's Block* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive, 2007).

28. LEWIS TURCO, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Non-fiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 53–57.

Maria Callas was rumored to have committed suicide.

Nelly Sachs was gotten out of Nazi Germany at the last possible moment. On a flight to Stockholm arranged by Selma Lagerlöf.

With Reader well aware that he has still not satisfactorily thought Protagonist through.

Once, indisputably, more of an existence than his cartoons and the reculant weeds amid the headstones of strangers.

How has Protagonist managed to so calamitously fuck up his life?

More than fifty thousand people followed Sartre's cortege to Montparnasse Cemetery.

Where someone in the crowd fell into the grave on top of his coffin.

Truman Capote was an anti-Semite.

Or is he in some peculiar way perhaps thinking of an autobiography?

Did Jesus ever laugh?

Thirty-six publishers rejected *The Ginger Man*.

Houses. Automobiles. Summer homes.

Indulgences.

Jules Pascin committed suicide by slashing his wrists. And wrote, Lucy, forgiveness, to his mistress in blood on a wall.

Flaubert and Baudelaire were prosecuted for immorality in the same year.

PLATE 1. Page from David Markson's novel *Reader's Block*.

singular and takes Emmet's point of view. The narrator has subjective access to Emmet's thoughts and actions and takes a quizzical but empathetic tone.

I have chosen *Mark* because it represents a medium length study. Here the central character is the writer who writes about, and in relation to, a second character named Mark. Mark becomes a shifting entity who changes as the writer adopts different positions in relation to him. *Mark* begins from an author orientated viewpoint but shifts to character orientation and is written in first person singular and plural, and tips into third person. Access to the character Mark is sometimes subjective and sometimes objective. The study has three sections and each uses a different tone of voice.

I have chosen *You are of vital importance to the art community* because it is a short study with an uneven style. The central character is a figure referred to as 'You' (the second person singular). This nameless character is written in relation to a place and a community and the narrative is character orientated. The study is written from a single perspective by a narrator who has subjective access to the character. Here the tone of voice is broadly affectionate, but because the syntax shifts from sentence to sentence, a disorientating mood is created. I will reflect on these studies in the chronological order they were written in.

The methodology I have outlined here has one foot in the past, one foot in the present and one foot in the future – three feet, three steps, three studies. I will reflect on the studies by examining what *is* written on the page and *how* it was written, and then I will speculate on what *will* be written. I am now going to apply my proposed methodology to the three studies.

The annotations on the printed, published pages from *Emmet, Mark and You are of vital importance to the art community* became so dense they became almost illegible to another reader. Within this reflective manuscript I have developed a simplified system of highlighting and underlining. Examples of the original annotated pages have been scanned and placed in Appendix B.

15) **Emmet**

Emmet is unsure if what happened to him today is interesting. His girlfriend is not only being polite, she wants to coax him out, to raise the temperature between them. If he gives something away, the not much he saw or felt today, he usually ends up feeling poorer, as if less of him is left. Emmet is troubled by the way he holds himself back from exploiting her offer of an open ear. **Nothing** happened today, he turned up on time for the bus, for work, for lunch but no, **nothing** to report. Things did happen but they were slight and will not, he suspects, survive conversation. They will not even endure description. 'If **nothing** happened today,' she says critically, 'make something up.'

His eyes climb up the wall to the ceiling trying to escape her demand. Intimidated by the blank white space, he starts to hum, willing a thought from outside to come in. *Make something up, anything, just say anything.* His daily reality gets in the way. Wishing his privacy was less intact, he risks the word 'I...' then lapses back into '...mmmmmmmm.' The spontaneity he imagines being overtaken by does not appear. The lack is painful. His eyes reluctantly pivot downward to meet hers, he opens his mouth but **nothing** flows out. Not this time. He feels too owned. If he wants to

Part III Essays

4. *Emmet*: Redescribing the Published Study

Before *Emmet* gets underway Emmet is placed in close proximity to the word ‘nothing’. In this domestic scene stretching from arriving home to going to bed ‘nothing’ appears six times in the space of three paragraphs. Emmet is stymied on all sides by the word, even his own utterance fades to nothing. The idea of proximity to nothing is absurd, Emmet is close to an absence of something. ‘Nothing’ is standing in for the nearness of certain feelings: feelings of lack, inadequacy and insignificance. The way ‘nothing’ repeats, peppering the page (‘Emmet’ only appears three times in the same space) draws me to consider how each sentence uses the word differently. ‘Nothing’ is mobile, moving from a characteristic of the outside world: an absence of event to an interior emptiness: a deprivation of words coalescing into a lack of interest in the world itself. The suggestion is that ‘nothing’ colonises everything and proximity to these feelings characterise Emmet.

Emmet is asked how his day was but he is a cup half empty lacking in more than one way. He experiences less than he feels he should, is unable to speak of what little he does experience and is forsaken by the spontaneity of speech. Emmet is shrinking, retracting from his proper noun. At the start, when the title leads the way, his name becomes synonymous with nothing – and ‘nothing’ quickly leads to ‘no’. Lying in bed his thoughts become tangled up with ‘no’.

Emmet is introduced as the reluctant half of a heterosexual couple in a slump of cohabitation. After work but before sleep Emmet is expected to share his day, to put words to feelings and make an offering. And this expectation is an inverted response to an emotional freeze between the couple, as the narrator suggests, there is more to her question, ‘His girlfriend is not only being polite [...]’. By trying but failing to answer Emmet discovers some of his experiences are sub-language, beneath words and might disintegrate in conversation. What kind of experiences disintegrate when shared? Or, what kind of description crushes a liminal experience? There are different kinds of telling – the difference between description, exposition, utterance and expression are telling. Emmet’s experiences perish in the shared space of conversation, collapsing on the threshold of his body, on the tip of his tongue. If description is a strain upon these fragile, personal events then conversation hasn’t got a chance. In the first few sentences Emmet speaks entirely through the narrator failing to deliver reported speech.

Emmet’s domestic situation sets out a problem of communication between a couple viewed from one perspective. The threshold of what constitutes an event in

think differently he will need to stand on his head or walk on his hands. She twists her mouth and folds her arms. He asks her what she'd like for dinner.

At the end of the evening, head on pillow, he feels flat rather than tired. *I'm not saying 'no' to her.* The 'no' is really a 'no' to speaking of so little, 'no' to the embarrassment of **nothing**. Emmet returns to the blank, white ceiling. Slowly raising an arm, he levitates his right hand off the duvet and into the air. He feels the blood rush back down towards him. Hovering in the space above his head, his hand extends an index finger. He closes his left eye and the finger starts to point, tracing the cracks in the ceiling. Picking out this or that the finger searches the room for something interesting but is unable to settle. Wandering up the walls and out the window the finger seeks without stopping, finding **nothing** of significance.

Workshop 1: Adults educated at night

Reaching around, Emmet's hand finds the wall and travels along in search of a light switch. He keeps on going and ends up shuffling to the far end of the classroom where headlights from the street bend up the walls. His eyes adjust. Spilling into the darkness after him the other adults educated at night feel their way forwards.

Mary arrives and switches the lights on. She will lead the workshop tonight because Allison is away. Emmet wonders, *away where?* Precious little is said. Tonight, Mary is the substitute, Emmet will be the

Emmet's world is too high, words trample events so he gives up on speech, regressing to pre-linguistic pointing. What is pointing to this non-linguistic character? Here the psychologist George Butterworth describes why infants point:

Pointing serves to refer as precisely as possible to objects for joint attention. The precision may arise because pointing makes use of the same anatomical adaptations and attention mechanisms that serve tool use. Pointing connects a visual referent to the concurrent sound stream so that a relation of identity exists between these two aspects of the infant's perceptual experience. That is, pointing serves not only to individuate the object, but also to authorize the link between the object and speech from the baby's perspective. Pointing allows visual objects to take on auditory qualities, and this is the royal road (but not the only route) to language.¹

Pointing provokes a carer to name, describe and ask questions about what is being pointed at. Pointing draws a vocal response from another but with nobody present Emmet can only prompt himself to identify something, *anything* of interest. Emmet abandons speech in favour of a gesture, his index finger searching for a way out.

Emmet's mute, pointing hand eventually leads me out through his bedroom window and into a darkened room. It is his hand, as opposed to his thought or his intention, that gets Emmet out of a scene fraught with inadequacy and into 'Workshop 1'. Once he has stepped into the unknown, his eyes adjust to see he is not the only person shuffling blindly into the workshop. It is Mary, the workshop leader, who finally puts the lights on and announces herself as a substitute. When Emmet discovers Mary is not the real deal, merely Allison's replacement, he speaks clearly for the first time in the narrative. Emmet notes Allison's unexplained absence and the blasé attitude of her substitute: in a critical mood he suddenly discovers his voice, 'But,' Emmet asks Mary, 'what if you are away?' She replies 'Then Caroline will lead the workshop. And if Caroline is away the group will lead themselves.' Where there should be leadership Emmet finds a spiral of female substitutes that ultimately lead back to the group itself and, as Emmet realises, the group is composed entirely from women making him the only man.

In Workshop 1 three characters are present: Emmet, the female participants and a workshop leader, Mary. The female participants go without proper nouns, do not speak but constitute 'the group' and the workshop leader is a role occupied by substitutes. The place and year in which this workshop takes place is vague but the present tense tethers Emmet to now. There are very few details about why the workshop is taking place; nothing as instrumental as a course structure, ethos or ideology provides answers.

1. GEORGE BUTTERWORTH, 'Pointing is the Royal Road to Language in Babies', *Pointing: Where Language, Culture and Cognition Meet*, [Routledge ebook edn.] (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008), <<https://www.questia.com/read/106441261/pointing-where-language-culture-and-cognition>>, accessed 3 May 2015, 29.

new member of **the group** and the workshop will continue as planned. 'But,' Emmet asks Mary, 'what if you are away?' She replies, 'Then Caroline will lead the workshop. And, if Caroline is away the group will lead themselves.' Emmet settles into his seat, stowing his bag under his chair, out of the corner of his eye scrutinising Mary's preparations.

Emmet is tapped gently on his arm, he turns to the woman sitting next to him and one more plastic cup slides out of itself into his hand. Too light to hold anything, the cup is the last one but identical in every other way. Equalled by the cups, sitting in a circle, Emmet notices his difference: he is the only man.

A thick black permanent marker passes between them, Mary asks **everyone** to find a unique mark to identify their cup, or risk being mixed up, and put their mouth where someone else's has been. Some settle for their initials, others use their signature, Emmet holds the pen but cannot write, drawing unnecessary attention, holding things up. The cup waits for Emmet, the pen hesitates before the cup. The pen's touch is permanent: thick, black, indelible. Emmet cannot mark the cup. Emmet cannot mark *I*. Emmet cannot *I* the cup. What mark should he be? Who is he to mark this cup permanently? He gives up. Irreducible to a mark Emmet lets himself be. He'll be the only cup without a mark. He wants to say something to the group about individuality and the cup but the next thing is already coming out of Mary's polythene bag. She notices Emmet's urgency and reassures

Emmet is on the back foot as he enters the uncertainty of the workshop: the darkness of the room, the unpredictability of strangers, women are an indivisible majority and the leadership of the group is unstable and provisional. Emmet is outclassed, outmanoeuvred and at a disadvantage. Gender is the overt difference at play but for Emmet his gender, and gender as an issue, is never self-consciously addressed. The first workshop signals a shift in the narrative from gender as experienced within the discreet and private form of a couple to gender in the social form of a group. Individual differences in interpersonal space become dispersed into a workshop. Women are the social substrate rather than a quality of an 'other' and leadership is a generically female function. Where there was one woman there are now many who constitute 'the group' and its leadership. However, unlike the domestic scene, in the workshop Emmet begins to feel his difference more urgently than his lack.

The narrator is attentive to Emmet, his perspective is given space on the page. Emmet's observations and actions take priority. The narrator is technically 'omniscient' but as the writer and literary critic James Wood concedes, 'So-called omniscience is almost impossible. As soon as someone tells a story about character, narrative seems to want to bend itself around that character, wants to merge with that character, to take on his or her way of thinking and speaking.'² Mostly the momentum of the narrative comes from Emmet's responses to the group and the group is galvanized by instructions. The workshop leader gives instructions and the instructions come to denote the group because the group is, more often than not, addressed through an instruction to 'everyone' or 'anyone', or 'them'. Mary is simplified to a tannoy. Emmet's questions tend to be met with opaque gestures, 'Questions are met with her smile.' Emmet flounders in the wake of more instructions and exactly how he flounders is revealing: 'Emmet holds the pen but cannot write, drawing unnecessary attention [...]'.

The group becomes a matrix giving form to an instruction, a form Emmet can see and reflect on. Emmet's agency is set in motion by the instructions as embodied by 'everyone'. Emmet is instructed to represent his uniqueness by marking the side of a plastic cup with a black pen in order to identify the cup as his. He hesitates and falls into an anthropomorphic muddle, his subjectivity becomes tangled up with the cups. Out of this confusion comes a strange reversal whereby Emmet assimilates the cup's blankness instead of imposing his identity on the cup. This displaced anxiety slowly starts to coalesce into a thought worth uttering, 'He wants to say something to the group about individuality and the cup [...]'. Emmet discovers he has something to say about his experience but is silenced by Mary. Again and again, the physical momentum of the workshop cuts Emmet off. His speech is repeatedly forgone, postponed, prohibited or curtailed by group activity.

2. JAMES WOOD, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 8.

him that the exercises will end with group reflection.

The next object is a loaf of white bread, sliced, something Emmet has not eaten since he left home. Each person takes a slice and passes the loaf on. Dividing the loaf triggers nervous laughter. Mary asks, 'Is anyone hungry?' quickly followed by, 'Well you can't eat the bread.' Questions are met with her smile. Emmet's unfamiliarity with the situation unsettles him. He looks at the slice, already too long between his fingertips the bread has moulded into the shape of a pinch and divorced the idea of food. Everywhere crumbs need picking up, Emmet bites the cup's lip and waits. 'Has everyone got a cup and a slice?' Mary asks. She then instructs them to bite off a mouthful and begin chewing, adding, 'But do not swallow. No swallowing.' Because this is an exercise Emmet chews properly, politely rolling mush around his mouth. A blushing disgust settles on his cheeks. One by one, everyone's mouths stop churning. All around eyes wait for the next instruction. Mary reminds them, 'Do not spit, do not swallow.' Emmet breathes around the mush, circumnavigating the mass displacing his tongue. His expression is bloated. Pressure builds up behind, lips tighten in front: thoughts begin to back up. Fighting the swallow, waiting to spit, cup to the ready Emmet holds on. Emmet is invited to feel what is going on inside. Nothing goes in or out, his mouth is stuck. Panicking and trapped the words can't fly off or get digested. His voice suffocates. He tongues the bread. He can't

Like a drill the instructions provide momentum for Emmet, rather than sending him deeper into himself they keep him on his toes, in his body and block out the past with the velocity of the present. Artist and writer Ingo Niermann describes drill as a way of adjusting or diversifying human instincts without telling of the self. Niermann writes:

Throughout history, human beings have increasingly taken fate into their own hands. They had a hand not only in land and tools but also in themselves. This they could do over and over in a new way or react to a specific constellation with an ever-constant, unconsciously performed behaviour. The simplest technique for bringing this internalization about consists in an ever-constant but still-conscious repetition of the behavior and is known as drill. With drill, man can systematically expand and update his repertoire of instincts.³

Should one seize control of oneself in this way, then one is already someone else. To produce a sustained effect, one has to drill. Freely forcing oneself, however, is a paradox. One has to introduce a second level, the quotation marks stay visible. One is not really in the game, but with every intention.⁴

What Niermann introduces through the concept of the drill is the paradoxical idea of ‘freely forcing oneself’ – bracketing the self in order to facilitate change. In a similar paradox Emmet is introduced to his own agency by instruction.

Workshop 1 ends with a ‘drill’ to obfuscate his mouth. Emmet’s earlier reservations about speech are revisited by immobilising his voice. As instructed, Emmet chews but does not swallow the bread. He closes his mouth and travels inwards into a visceral space. Creating a physical obstacle to speech keeps him talking, not out loud but on the page through the narrator’s ventriloquism. When speech is prohibited he discovers he has something urgent to say. Adam Phillips articulates how desire and obstacles are inseparable within narrative to maintain momentum and how they conceal the limits of our self-determinism. He writes:

It is impossible to imagine desire without obstacles, and wherever we find something to be an obstacle we are at the same time desiring. It is part of the fascination of the Oedipus story in particular, and perhaps of narrative in general, that we and the heroes and heroines of their fictions never know whether obstacles create desire, or desire creates obstacles. We are never quite sure which it is we are seeking, and it is difficult to imagine how to keep the story going without both.⁵

The narrator puts words onto the page for Emmet who has thoughts building up in

3. INGO NIERMANN, *Choose Drill/Drill dich* (100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, 34; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 12.

4. Ibid. 13–14.

5. ADAM PHILLIPS, ‘Looking at Obstacles’, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 87.

cough, can't talk: anger fastens on. He rakes up the past. She asks him to hold everything inside for a couple of moments longer, to remember the feelings, they are going to talk about them later.

Workshop 2: Age and experience appends wisdom to innocence

There he is again, a week later, prising one shoe off with the other, cold rising off the floor into the soles of his feet. Once everyone is standing in their socks, Mary introduces the exercise for the evening as 'Orphans and Innocents'. She asks them to choose: they can be an Orphan or an Innocent. They must divide into two groups, Orphans to the wall with the windows, Innocents along the radiator opposite. Emmet turns to the woman next to him and asks, 'What does she mean?' Mary overhears and reminds him to choose silently, he has to make his own mind up, the exercise will end with group discussion.

He isn't sure what to do so he sits on the floor and watches. At the start, there is an interval of determination to be good at the task that galvanises the group into action. Instantly, some people know who they are and take a position. Innocents huddle around the radiator pretending not to talk. Orphans line up below the window with their arms crossed. Emmet intuitively feels like an Orphan but the window side of the room is even colder than the floor he is sitting on.

As more choose the exercise explains itself. With the addition of each new person the categories of

the wake of discomfort and frustration. The chewing bread exercise creates difficult thoughts that interrupt Emmet. This intimate and embarrassing action performed in front of strangers, on the threshold of inner and outer makes Emmet determined. As Phillips points out in a much later essay *On Frustration*, thinking transforms frustration:

Thought is what makes frustration bearable, and frustration makes thought possible. Thinking modifies frustration, rather than evading it, by being a means by which we can go from feeling frustrated to figuring out what to do about it, and doing it; what Freud called ‘trial action in thought’ – and what we might call imagination – leading to real action in reality.⁶

Workshop 1 concludes with an instruction to hold everything inside, Emmet is promised that feelings will be discussed later but the narrative jumps forward censoring him once more. Again in Workshop 2 Mary promises a chance to feedback at the end but the narrative ceases just as talking is about to begin. Potential outpourings from Emmet or the group are stemmed by Mary or excluded from the narrative. These omissions create gaps in the narrative. An unpredictable and evolving chain of instructions and actions prevent Emmet from revealing feelings. Where there might be conversations and discussions there are exercises that animate, contort, divide or unify.

Halfway through *Emmet* at the mid-point of the work a division of the group provides Emmet with an opportunity. In Workshop 2 the members of the group are asked to identify themselves as either an ‘Innocent’ or an ‘Orphan’ by standing at different sides of the room. Emmet sits and watches the exercise unfold. He is indecisive but chooses to stand with the ‘Orphans’. Once the cleaving of the group is complete and everyone has settled on opposite sides a void opens up. The instructions cease and Mary sits alone in the middle of the room. There should be another command but Mary becomes mute and unresponsive, the group is immobilised by her silence, the floor is empty. A void is at the centre: the void of the instructing voice and the void of continual substitution is at the group’s centre. The emphasis shifts from the group to substitution and dependency. Emmet turns his back to look out the window but is faced by a brick wall. When he turns around he is confronted once again by that difficult word, ‘Nothing is happening’.

But this hiatus is a new kind of nothing and Emmet strides out. As he walks across the room, witnessed by the group, he takes centre stage, ‘Emmet is walking more slowly than he usually does, or the walking feels slower. All their looking, directed only at him, is thick and sticky and clings.’ Switching sides to be with the ‘Innocent’ fills Emmet up. What changes is how he categorises himself: as more dependent, less

6. ADAM PHILLIPS, ‘On Frustration’, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 24–25.

tainty with passivity, looking directly into each face, steadying her gaze. The Innocents seem at ease with the silence but the Orphans are restless, Emmet sighs and turns his back on everyone. The window looks out onto a brick wall, cold cuts through the glass. He turns back. **Nothing is happening.** He pushes off the wall and strides across the floor, taking everyone's attention with him. Mary watches him go, she smiles, one brow animated by surprise; he sends an identical smile back. Both groups suddenly straighten up, what is Emmet going to do? Emmet is walking more slowly than he usually does, or the walking feels slower. All their looking, directed only at him, is thick and sticky and clings. Emmet stops in front of the oldest Innocent, and says, 'I'm cold, can you move up please?' The Innocents squeeze together and Emmet slides his back onto the hot radiator. Mary asks, 'Did you change your mind?' He grins. Now he has volume and density inside, he is in possession of something interesting, something everyone can talk about, something to get the conversation going during group reflection.

Mary invites the groups to split. 'Innocents choose an Orphan, Orphans choose an Innocent. All the spare Innocents will need to partner each other.' Emmet finds a willing Orphan. Everyone is instructed to collect their partner's shoes and find a quiet space. With everyone settled into twos, Mary asks them to: 'Take it in turns. Sit opposite each other and carefully put your partner's shoes on for them. Gently. As if you

were the grown-up. If there is anything to say, say it.'

Emmet kneels down and gripping the back of her ankle slides her foot towards him and into the shoe. Then, raising her calf, he brings the shoe and her foot to rest on his thigh. The foot and shoe are, of course, upside down. The task is inverted. For a moment his brain is back to front. He has to think. He holds her right lace limp in his left hand; left lace in right hand. *How do you tie a bow again?* Performed slowly, upside down, each twist and tug has an exciting, sensual density. Finally, the knot is secure but reversed.

Workshop 3: Organ too strange to be accommodated

Caroline will lead the workshop. Mary is away. Emmet's bones crack loudly as he crosses his legs on the floor. Caroline didn't ask anyone to sit but the chairs have been removed and Emmet doesn't like standing. By being in the group Emmet has learnt that if he doesn't like something he had better do something about it. Emmet doesn't think Caroline should be apologising, Mary's absence is not her fault. The substitute's substitute looks nervous. Weirdly, Emmet feels powerful gazing up at Caroline from the floor and when they make eye contact she looks away first. Emmet imagines reclining even further onto one elbow and fanning his limbs across the carpet tiles. But he isn't sure he can carry it off, or what the gesture might say to the group.

knowing – innocent. For the first time in the text Mary asks him to speak but he returns a grin. He was hollow but now he contains an experience that can be transformed into words and he chooses to control this potential, ‘Now, he has volume and density inside, he is in possession of something interesting, something everyone can talk about [...]’.

This strident gesture changes Emmet and to mark this the workshop ends with a reversal. The scale of action shrinks, Emmet must perform the intimate task of tying a shoelace upside down on another person. He succeeds discovering a newly won dexterity. What Emmet achieves in the final sentence of the workshop is a ‘secure knot’. As the third workshop gets underway Emmet feels increasingly secure with the group. John Bowlby, the psychologist, psychiatrist and principal proponent of Attachment Theory, described three principal patterns of attachments founded in infancy but persisting into adulthood, the ‘secure pattern’ being a stable foundation:

These are secure attachment in which the individual is confident that his parents (or parent figure) will be available, responsive, and helpful should he encounter adverse or frightening situations. With this assurance, he feels bold in his explorations of the world.⁷

A second pattern is that of anxious resistant attachment in which the individual is uncertain whether his parent will be available or responsive or helpful when called upon. Because of this uncertainty he is always prone to separation anxiety, tends to be clinging, and is anxious about exploring the world.⁸

A third pattern is that of anxious avoidant attachment in which the individual has no confidence that, when he seeks care, he will be responded to helpfully but, on the contrary, expects to be rebuffed. When in marked degree such an individual attempts to live his life without the love and support of others, he tries to become emotionally self-sufficient and may later be diagnosed as narcissistic or having a false self of the type described by Winnicott (1960).⁹

Emmet’s behaviour across the workshops echos Bowlby’s patterns. The first and final workshops are in some respects symmetrical. Emmet’s anxious response to the instability of the group’s leadership is restaged with a different outcome in Workshop 3. When confronted with Caroline, the substitute’s substitute, Emmet reclines on the floor. She is the one who is nervous and Emmet, ‘[...] doesn’t think Caroline should be apologising, Mary’s absence is not her fault.’ Emmet leads the way for the rest of the group to sit down on the carpet and from the floor he makes his first observation about gender. Emmet isn’t listening, he’s lost in thought about the woman next to him sitting in an uncomfortable pencil skirt. Emmet is on the back foot again but this time immersed in an observation of another.

7. JOHN BOWLBY, *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 140.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

More join Emmet on the carpet as Caroline introduces the theme of tonight's workshop: identity within the group. Now Caroline is up and running everyone can relax, everyone except the woman next to Emmet who is bound into a feudal kneeling position by her narrow work skirt; he smiles sympathetically. Out of Caroline's bag comes a roll of yellow tape, she zips the bag back up and strides to the other end of the room; Emmet realises he wasn't listening and has no idea why Caroline is standing behind them. Emmet hears her tear off a length of tape and looks over his shoulder; she is sticking the yellow tape onto the carpet next to the thigh of a woman who is sitting cross-legged. Around each member of the group Caroline advances a yellow line, marking out their personal space and separating them from their neighbour. On her haunches with her head down Caroline edges along at ground level adjusting the line that divides the space between each person. Halfway across the room, Caroline takes the strain off her calves and begins kneeling while she works: everyone is respectful and still. Emmet concentrates on compressing himself as she draws around him disturbing his composure, entering his personal space with her elbow and knee.

Now they are all done Caroline tapes herself out of the group and stands back to view her work. Facing her, in the middle of the room, is a group of people caught in a yellow net and encircling everyone, along the skirting board, is a narrow corridor of clear space.

Workshop 3 contains only one instruction, more of an invitation, to step outside the lattice of tape Caroline has drawn around and between everyone. Caroline leads the exercise non-verbally, marking out bodies and space. Emmet's body space is grazed by Caroline and he responds by contracting himself. The narrative closes with a shift in perspective as the group stands up and steps back seeing themselves configured on the floor as a unity of uneven cells. In 1922 Sigmund Freud wrote *Group Psychology and The Analysis of The Ego*.¹⁰ His subject matter, how narcissism is limited when the individual becomes subsumed by the group, heavily draws on research by the French Psychologist and Sociologist Gustave Le Bon, particularly *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Le Bon uses a cellular metaphor:

The most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological group is the following. Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a group puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation. There are certain ideas and feelings which do not come into being, or do not transform themselves into acts except in the case of individuals forming a group. The psychological group is a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements, which for a moment are combined, exactly as the cells which constitute a living body form by their reunion a new being which displays characteristics very different from those possessed by each of the cells singly.¹¹

The group is transformational in the way Le Bon describes but contrary to Le Bon, Emmet is less in possession of a 'collective mind' and more in possession of his own mind.

The last paragraph of the narrative indirectly addresses the absence of conversation in the workshops, 'Whatever was between everyone, woven invisibly in the space around their bodies is now traced in yellow tape on tiled carpet'. What happened to the omitted conversations and forestalled outpourings? The process of bonding – and all the telling of the self this usually entails – has been inscribed as a diagram on the carpet, still part of the narrative but in a graphic two-dimensional form. Attachment is made

10. SIGMUND FREUD, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', *The International Psycho-analytical Library*, No. 6, trans. J. Strachey (London/Vienna: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1921), [Gutenberg ebook edn.] (Salt Lake City: Gutenberg, 2011) < <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35877/35877-h/35877-h.htm> >, accessed 2 Feb. 2015.

11. GUSTAVE LE BON, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 12th Impression (London: Fisher Unwin, 1920), cited in Sigmund Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', *The International Psycho-analytical Library*, No. 6, trans. J. Strachey (London/Vienna: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1921), [Gutenberg ebook edn.] (Salt Lake City: Gutenberg, 2011), < <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35877/35877-h/35877-h.htm> >, accessed 2 Feb. 2015, para. 8.

She asks the group to stand up and step out of their outlines and into the clear space. Emmet, like the other cross-legged sitters, has made an oval shape on the carpet, the women who were kneeling leave neat rectangles and anyone who sat with their legs curved around them has formed a teardrop with a point where their toes finished.

Whatever was between everyone, woven invisibly in the space around their bodies is now traced in yellow tape on tiled carpet. They look at what they have left behind. The group has an outer membrane, irregular and amorphous, and inside is a matrix of individual cells, each one squint and unique. Like an organ, too strange to be accommodated, they have left the body and are sustaining themselves.

visible by measuring the interstices between people. Bonding is beyond exposition in this narrative of interruptions, instructions and substitution.

Emmet escapes 'nothing' by drilling with a group of nameless women. Following this logic, the group is composed of women because it was a woman who he felt nothing with. A dance is enacted between his idea of an intimidating group, gender and instruction. Emmet is regenerated within the substrate of the group and his characteristics diversify as each instruction is carried out. Emmet begins with nothing to say and is gradually uncoupled. Emmet is empty then the group exercises fill him up. He is a character with a deficit of character until the drills make him notice his thoughts. Emmet is initially on the back foot and withdrawn, then on the back foot and observant.

In the present tense, in a particularly truncated narrative, a lot is left unknown. Each instruction delivered without explanation exaggerates the brevity of the text excluding me and Emmet from the bigger picture. The workshops are neither therapy nor education but a surreal hybrid of both. In Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor's sociological study *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*¹² they describe some of the ways people cope with 'the nightmare of repetition'¹³ in order to keep on living a hum-drum, everyday life. One strategy involves seeking out 'free areas':

It is difficult to find any intrinsic behavioural characteristics of free areas – so diverse are they in content – other than that of voluntary participation. These are the areas in which man does not sell his self. They might best be classified not in terms of their own features – which might be wholly mundane and uninteresting – but in terms of the area of paramount reality which the individual is trying to edge away from and to put on the line. There are *activity enclaves* in which people try to dig out, through hobbies, sex, games, sport, a safe place for self-expression and identity work; *new landscapes* in which people use holidays and adventures to get away from the routine world, to find a setting for acting out their fantasies, and *mindscape*s where the voyage, with the aid of drugs and various therapies is an internal one.¹⁴

Cohen and Taylor go on to critically explore the specifics of each 'activity enclave' identifying therapy as one such space. What is striking in *Emmet* is the vagueness of his 'enclave': the overt lack of aims and agenda, the determined obscurity of the substitute leaders, the bizarre exercises, the void at the centre makes the workshops unplaceable. The absence of any rationale or context for the workshops is what makes them so challenging and abrasive for Emmet to encounter. In this narrative conversations are

12. STANLEY COHEN and LAURIE TAYLOR, *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life* (2nd edn., London: Routledge, 1992).

13. Ibid. 66–87.

14. Ibid. 114–115.

superseded by forced encounters, group exercises are an antidote to feeling nothing, too little or the loss of desire to speak and bonds are secured without talking. The workshops are separated off, divorced from Emmet's domestic scene and this is where he remains as the narrative closes.

What is explicitly fictional about the pocket of surreal activity in which Emmet finds himself is the way he becomes as abridged as the workshops. There is a tension in *Emmet* created by the instructions: they sustain narrative momentum, forcing Emmet to act but also limit his agency. Emmet is released into the matrix of the workshops but once there he is retained minimally, a proper noun resisting a void. The literary critic William H. Gass describes the way a character is built upon their name:

Normally, characters are fictional human beings, and thus are given proper names. In such cases, to create a character is to give meaning to an unknown X; it is *absolutely to define*; and since nothing in life corresponds to these X's, their reality is borne by their name. They *are*, what it *is*.¹⁵

There is a contorting or pulling of Emmet between character and proper noun. The narrative tries to frustrate and release the proper noun 'Emmet' into its own agency. Eventually Emmet resists the instructions but he cannot resist the truncation of the narrative or the sensitivity, or insensitivity, of the narrator. The writer and literary critic James Wood makes a comparison between God, the omniscient author and the omnipotent novelist.¹⁶ Emmet reaches his limit as a character because the scenarios he inhabits are sparse and skeletal. Reading *Emmet* is more like reading a proposal for a character: the possibilities are exciting but the consequences unknown. Overall, the atmosphere created by *Emmet* is striking because it is oblique and puzzling, as if the scenario itself is gently but determinedly off-kilter.

15. WILLIAM H. GASS, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1979), 50–51.

16. JAMES WOOD, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 91–92.

5. *Emmet*: Redescribing the Writing Process

Emmet had a number of roots: the novel *Mr Phillips* by John Lanchester,¹ the essay on this novel by Adam Phillips² and my experiences in group workshops. I didn't begin with the aim of writing a character study; *Emmet* accumulated. I wrote freely and discovered I had a number of very short pieces that related. Then there was a difficult moment when I linked together these pieces about group workshops, psychological exercises and the atmosphere of adult education. They had enough common ground to warrant them being connected but no structure with which to unite them. Then I saw *DOUG* by the artist Janice Kerbel.³ *DOUG* is a performance which takes the form of nine songs for six voices. Listening to the seminal performance made me realise character could be a structure with which to develop the linked pieces. Each of the nine songs evoked an accident Doug experiences. The accidents which befall him are absurd, slapstick and random. Doug is characterised by the accidents and inversely the accidents are consolidated into a narrative under his name. After *DOUG*, I considered the linked pieces through the lens of a character who later became Emmet. I chose the name Emmet in homage to a character named Emmett from Nicholson Baker's novel *A Box of Matches* about observing small, quotidian events.⁴

The motivation for writing *Emmet* began with a mouthful of bread. In 2011, I attended a night class on listening skills.⁵ The course introduced the cohort to different therapeutic perspectives through practical exercises. Chewing but not swallowing a mouthful of bread introduced Gestalt psychotherapy. In the 1940s and 1950s, the psychotherapist Fritz Perls with his wife Laura developed a mode of therapy designed to enhance sensitivity to perception, emotion and behaviour in the present moment.⁶ Gestalt therapy advocates bodily awareness:

The internal bodily sensations and associated feelings (inner zone awareness) are part of a person's embodied experience. We are continually experiencing bodily sensations in relationship to one another. Sometimes, a person keeps these sensations out of awareness as they are associated with feelings deemed unacceptable to the person. Inviting clients to pay attention to their bodily sensations and notice what they are feeling can help reawaken awareness.⁷

1. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

2. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

3. JANICE KERBEL, *DOUG* [performance], composition Janice Kerbel in collaboration with Laurie Bamon, Philip Venables (Glasgow: Common Guild, 2014), performed in Glasgow at the Mitchell Library, Jeffrey Room, 1 May 2014.

4. NICHOLSON BAKER, *A Box of Matches* (London: Vintage, 2004).

5. COSCA Certificate in Counselling Skills, Centre for Therapy, Glasgow, 2010–2012.

6. CHARLOTTE SILLS, PHIL LAPWORTH and BILLY DESMOND, *An Introduction to Gestalt* (London: Sage, 2012), 3–7.

7. Ibid. 56.

Following the night class I made some notes in response to the gestalt exercise, the sensations needed exorcising, thus I began with a feeling of wanting to expel the bodily discomfort created by an exercise. Then in 2014 I was invited by the artists support network AxisWeb to lead a writing workshop.⁸ I went back to my COSCA course materials to devise writing exercises on the theme of embodiment and discovered my chewing bread notes. As I began extending these notes other exercises from night classes came back to me. ‘Innocents and Orphans’ is an exercise used in the training of person-centred psychotherapists and the yellow tape exercise was a hybrid of trust and improvisation exercises from a series of *Art of Acting* courses I did.⁹

I led the AxisWeb workshop, proposing the exercises as a physical starting point for writing about bodily experience. Being in the role of workshop leader allowed me to imagine new exercises and reflect on how to promote the agency of the class and mitigate their dependency of leadership. How much or little I said influenced the participants’ responses. Through the AxisWeb workshop I experienced delivering exercises through instructions. Afterwards I was able to consolidate *Emmet* with a new awareness. When writing I drew on experiences as both a participant in, and leader of workshops. Experiences of pedagogical practice, research into psychotherapies, my personal therapy and introductory training in counselling skills were all informing the writing of *Emmet*.

Writing about workshops led to more writing about the broader circumstances of adult education. Over the years, my fellow night class students have been from a wide range of generations and diverse economic backgrounds. The fees for night classes were low in comparison to full-time education enabling people on low incomes to attend. At the start of a course we were mostly strangers. On occasions when friends or colleagues attended the same class they were the aberration. Those with a pre-existing relationship occupied an inverted position of outsiders – outside the shared experience of being strangers, amongst strangers a slippage of character was possible. Strangers and ‘stranger status’¹⁰ became themes in a number of pieces I was writing simultaneously.

I wanted to exaggerate Emmet’s status as a stranger and pronounce his displacement. The adult education I participated in was dominated by women, often there was an ‘only man’. My adult education happened at night in time set aside for activities other than work. In-between professional, public and private spaces night classes often felt itinerant. The classes were squeezed in around daylight activities after the full-time

8. Writing workshop delivered for AxisWeb, 2014.

9. *The Art of Acting*: 1, 2, 3, 4, Strathclyde University, Glasgow, 2006–2008.

10. SARAH TRIPP, *You are of vital importance*, eds. Jane Rolo and Camilla Wills (London: Book Works, 2014), 15, 37, 84, 93, 129.

students had left. Empty corridors and classrooms hungover with spent cups, stray pens and chairs in disarray created an after hours atmosphere. Exploring recently vacated space generated an elicit and subversive mood: night classes provided a counter narrative opposing our daily lives. We had jobs, homes, routines but we wanted to redirect them. Everyone was dissatisfied in some way or we wouldn't have been there. We were going back to school, things needed to change and because time is short in adult life we paid attention and worked quickly.

I used this atmosphere of adult education to write from. I chose the present tense to emphasise Emmet's sense of uncertainty. I wrote a sequence of evening workshops. I surrounded Emmet with strangers – friends or colleagues would have softened his encounters. I wanted him to get away from his character as established in his domestic scenario and do something other than speak; to force him to behave differently. By applying force to him, I kept him in a situation where he could not settle or hide. *Emmet* was written in three drafts over the course of several months while other pieces were in progress. Each draft tackled core problems of tense, how to address a reader, gender themes, consistency of the narrator's proximity to or distance from Emmet.

When writing *Emmet* I referred to John Lanchester's novel *Mr Phillips*.¹¹ Mr Phillips' awkward, knotted personality made an impression on me and informed *Emmet* in an appropriately understated and repressed way. Mr Phillips turns out to be many things but he is ostensibly uptight, 'It is Mr Phillips' usual practice, when he wakes up to think about something semi-worrying, like his tax return or Thom's proposal to "borrow" the house for a party, as a way of getting himself warmed up for the day.'¹²

I read about Mr Phillips long before I encountered his character first-hand. I got to know Lanchester's novel through reading an essay written by Adam Phillips about *Mr Phillips*, titled *Mr Phillips*.¹³ I could have chosen any one of six essays under the heading of 'Characters' in Phillips' collection of essays but this one, with its synchronicity of proper nouns, reflected the collection's title *Equals*.

In many ways I preferred the essay on *Mr Phillips* to the book. The essay is more provocative, more useful if what you want to do is write. Phillips describes the novel as a depiction of thinking:

As the novel progresses – that is, tracks Mr Phillips from his leaving home in the morning to his return in the evening – 'Mr Phillips' seems less and less the name of a character, in the traditional sense, and more a name for certain ways of thinking, as though the novel is saying: these are the things that pass through us that our names are meant to cover.¹⁴

The essay is inherently speculative like a call for a response. I felt that Lanchester's

11. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

12. Ibid. 12.

13. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

14. Ibid. 201.

novel was in many ways too successful, too immersive to do move off from. The critical distance produced by Phillips' essay was enabling. So it was Phillips' *Mr Phillips*, rather than Lanchester's that paved the way for *Emmet*.

In Lanchester's book Victor Phillips spends a day wandering around London having conversations with whomever he meets in the city where he works. Or did work. He is dressed in a suit and leaves his house on time but once over the threshold he is free to *dériver* because nobody, not even his family, know he has been made redundant. Mr Phillips is a fish out of water, at odds with his unemployment and working out what happens next when his day is no longer mapped out by the nine-to-five. Written in the present tense through a sympathetic narrator, Mr Phillips confronts unstructured time: an unknown day in London. Likewise, I wrote *Emmet* in the present tense confronting the unknown workshop exercises. Phillips connects Mr Phillips' situation to a wider predicament, 'Questions come thick and fast to Mr Phillips because, as a modern man, he is nearly always in a need-to-know situation; but his curiosity has become a substitute for his courage, so the only person he can usually ask is himself, who by definition doesn't have the answers'.¹⁵ Life is unpredictable and people become defeated by trying to answer all the questions. Self-defeating thought patterns emerged when writing Emmet's anxious exchanges with the plastic cup and the group. I was trying to find a limit to Emmet's thinking, the kind of limit described by Phillips, 'Mr Phillips is as scrupulously thoughtful about the issue as he can be. You can imagine him as a child wanting to be able to work everything out for himself with that agitated attention to detail that makes one problem lead to another.'¹⁶ Mr Phillips' 'scrupulous thinking' is expressed through his obsessions with numbers, being an ex-accountant. Most of his thinking finds its limits in the art of statistics:

Granted, the fall from here might not kill him, even though water is harder the faster you hit it – for some reason Mr Phillips once heard on a TV science programme but could feel himself forgetting even as he was listening to it. Say it's 100 feet up, with the tide at this lowest ebb. At 32 feet per second per second, that's $32 + (32 + 32) = 96 = 2$ seconds at a climactic speed of 64 feet per second. You multiply by 15 and divide by 22 to get miles per hour which comes to 43 miles per hour, so if it is true that hitting water at speed is like hitting concrete you would be hitting concrete at 43 miles per hour, which ought to do it. But there are other, more certain places.¹⁷

Mr Phillips builds from the premise that most days are already planned by the time we wake up and once this plan is disabled nobody knows what will happen. This makes for a wandering reading experience, what drives the narrative is the lack of a

15. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 202.

16. Ibid. 203.

17. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 78.

plan and all the accompanying doubt and uncertainty. Phillips writes, 'The plot of this novel about a man who has lost the plot is simply a series of incidents, of encounters – with pornographers, tramps, bank robbers – whom he comes across in his new found quest to fill up the day.'¹⁸ The momentum and structure of *Mr Phillips* is formed by the obvious situation of having nothing to do.

As I began to link together workshops and exercises through the character of Emmet I turned to Mr Phillips' *dérive* for a narrative model which gives the impression of contingency. *Mr Phillips* is structured around the constraints of time and place rather than protagonist, antagonist, resolution.¹⁹ His encounters with strangers happen during one day and in the city of London. I began to think of *Emmet* as a sequence of encounters similarly set within the constraints of the time and place of each workshop. By the time I wrote Emmet into the Workshop about 'Orphans and Innocents' I was bored with him and he symmetrically became frustrated by the passivity of the group. I tried to develop Emmet by repressing his agency until the last possible moment. Mr Phillips makes a dramatic show of agency towards the end where he is held up in a bank. Everyone is forced to lie face down on the bank's carpet and Mr Phillips muses about his own death, how his family will mark his 'deathday'²⁰ and the comparable chances of winning the lottery or dying at any given time. Suddenly Mr Phillips realises, 'Today could be the day ... any day could be the day, of course, that is the whole point, but today especially',²¹ and stands up affording himself a better view of the raid and attracting the attention of the robbers. Phillips writes, 'It is a moment of startling and consummate bravery; by refusing to comply – and it is being told to lie down that Mr Phillips is objecting to, not just (or necessarily) the robbery – Mr Phillips makes his existential stand.'²²

I wanted to write a similar moment for Emmet. To give Emmet a simple physical gesture which could announce his resistance. I wanted Emmet to push against the instructions with his body rather than his mind or his voice. Once standing up in the middle of the hold-up, 'Mr Phillips can see the way people are lying scattered in the face-down position, not radiating out from a single point but higgledy-piggledy, pointing in all directions.'²³ Mr Phillips rebels and gains a new perspective; Emmet changes his mind and traverses the passivity of the group. These shifts of point of view amount to seeing things as they are. What Mr Phillips sees once he is standing,

18. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 200.

19. LEWIS TURCO, *The Book of Literary Terms* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 40.

20. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 208.

21. *Ibid.*

22. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 209.

23. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 208.

‘higgledy-piggledy’ people on the floor informed the pattern Emmet sees drawn in yellow tape on the floor. Being witnessed is what makes a gesture count and both Mr Phillips and Emmet are more interesting to others and themselves afterward.

Phillips concludes by making a point about ideas and characters, he argues:

In Mr Phillips Lanchester has written not a novel of ideas, but a novel about how a person’s ideas work inside him, and can seem to be the limits of his world; and not a psychological novel because neither Lanchester nor his narrator affects to have a superior knowledge of their hero.²⁴

What this summary alerted me to was the subtlety in the relationship between the writer, narrator and character. I was more careful not to patronise Emmet but I also struggled with this caution. When the narrator held back Emmet became increasingly dull. I had no idea where Emmet would ultimately end up other than in the next workshop and although this made the writing process exciting, without giving greater autonomy to Emmet at a structural level, the descriptions of the workshops became more interesting to me than him. The writing of the exercises pre-dated the writing of Emmet. I placed Emmet into the workshops, gave him instructions and shrank him to fit the scenario. Writing *Emmet* became a process of working him into the exercises. I used the exercises to render a character rather than starting with the character. *Emmet* was in a sense written back to front, as a foil to a set of instructions.

24. ADAM PHILLIPS, ‘Mr Phillips’, *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 210.

6. Notes

24.06.15

The character might be rendered through their interactions with small or large objects. Small and light as a plastic cup or as diffuse and frenetic as a group of people. Consider items worn close to the body or through the flesh. Jewellery? Clothes? Someone else's clothes?

Lise's vivid, chevroned skirt in Spark's *The Driver's Seat*. John Lanchester writes, 'Clothes are always important in Sparkworld, but seldom as much so as in *The Driver's Seat*. Lise's terrible outfits are clues to her derangement [...]'¹

Remember Bollas' metaphor of a room full of objects moved by a ghost, the arrangements of the room are character, the ghost is a person's idiom.² We apprehend character, 'By seeing the objects move, rather like observing the wind by watching the moving trees [...]'³ Objects can be words.

If the character doesn't speak out loud they will not necessarily be mute. They can be mute and articulate, silent yet heard, with the assistance of a narrator.

Who will be the narrator? Who is the omnipresent narrator? Not always the author. Who will be the narratee?⁴

The relationship between a narrator and a character limits or facilitates character. The limits of words might be important. The character may have reservations about what their words, their voice, their utterances can do for them. A sympathetic narrator, like the one accompanying Mr Phillips⁵, gives a reader intimacy with a character.

The character's name might be conspicuous. A conscious problem. Is the feeling of being alienated from your name alleviated by changing names? The naming, not the name, is the bind.

1. JOHN LANCHESTER, 'Introduction', *The Driver's Seat* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. x.

2. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2006), 54–55.

3. Ibid. 55.

4. GERALD PRINCE, 'Introduction to the Study of the Narratee', *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Hopkins (8th edn., Baltimore: The John Hopkins University, 1994), 7–25.

5. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

I am exploring name dysmorphia in *On hearing my name*.⁶

Does the character suffer from name 'dysmorphia'?

Deleuze and Guattari observe that the novel is the form with a history of lost names: 'The novel has always been defined by the characters who no longer know their name, what they are looking for, or what they are doing, amnesiacs, ataxics, catatonics.'⁷

Given names create inertia by being a short hand for a personal history, a lineage, a harbinger of obligation. The character changes their name? Does not reveal their name? Hates their name?

The name of the character might be an imposition – their diffuse being as 'he' or 'she' or 'they' cut short. An insistent but arbitrary name might exclude other possible selves. There might be two narratives: one belonging to the name and another to 'he' or 'she'. Could a proper noun disconnect from the thoughts, gestures and actions accumulating in the form of a character, could these attributes disperse? Could a proper noun and its attributes go their separate ways?

Could the character exist without a name? Just as Emmet assimilates the cup's blankness the character will discover that particular substances: water, smoke, fog evoke their self but erase their character – no need of a name.

The character might notice that certain narratives are tied to their name, they might need a new name or many names circulating simultaneously, they might change the pronunciation of their name.

Do I want to write an ersatz character like Paul Auster's Mr Blank from *Travels in the Scriptorium*?⁸ I don't want the character to be an idea.

Jan Verwoert describes power of naming:

In this sense magic is a form of applied semiotics, possibly the most radical kind of *nominalism*: the name is the key to whatever comes to be the case, to give a name to or put a name on someone or something is to transform them accordingly.

6. SARAH TRIPP, 'On hearing my name', *You are of vital importance*, eds. Jane Rolo and Camilla Wills (London: Book Works, 2014), 45.

7. GILLES DELEUZE and FÉLIX GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 192.

8. PAUL AUSTER, *Travels in the Scriptorium* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

If, for example, you know the right words to call a man a goat, a goat he will be ever after. Spells are invocations with lasting consequences. They put names on you that stick, for better or worse. One set of names to set things free and another to hold them down.⁹

There might be a struggle to put a name to a face or a face to a name.

Deleuze and Guattari describe faces as surfaces:

Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency or probability, delimit a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations. Similarly, the form of subjectivity, whether consciousness or passion, would remain absolutely empty if faces did not form loci of resonance that select the sensed or mental reality and make it conform in advance to a dominant reality. The face itself is redundancy. The face constructs the wall that the signifier needs in order to bounce off of; it constitutes the wall of the signifier, the frame or screen.¹⁰

The writer Italo Calvino when comparing the novel and cinema speaks about faces and searches for a literary equivalent for the close-up. He finds Balzac's physiognomic descriptions.¹¹

At their first glance the gamblers were able to read some horrible mystery in the newcomer's face. His youthful features were stamped with a clouded grace and the look in his eyes bore witness to efforts betrayed and to a thousand hopes deceived. The gloomy passivity of intended suicide imparted to his brow a dull, unhealthy pallor, a bitter smile drew creases round the corners of his mouth, and his whole physiognomy expressed a resignation which was distressing to behold.¹²

Characters might be substituted. Roles might be occupied by different people to make a character like quick sand. Substitutions might be made to ensure psychological survival.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, 'There is only one mother and father in the world, but there are a lot of men and women.'¹³

9. JAN VERWOERT, *COOKIE!*, ed. Vivian Sky Rehberg and Marnie Slater (Berlin: Sternberg, 2013), 76.

10. GILLES DELEUZE and FÉLIX GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 186.

11. ITALO CALVINO, 'Cinema and the Novel: Problems of Narrative', in *The Literature Machine: Essays*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), 74-80.

12. HONORÉ DE BALZAC, *The Wild Ass's Skin*, trans. Herbert J. Hunt (London: Penguin, 1977), 25-26.

13. ADAM PHILLIPS, *On Flirtation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. xviii.

If substitution is maintained as a consistent quality of a scenario the characters peripeteia¹⁴ might come from the moment of substitution itself, from what substitution does to dependency and desire. A substitution might confront a character with the limits of their adaptability. Their assimilation to substitutes might be a means of sustaining desire for the future, as opposed to repetition as a means of maintaining the past.

The present tense is when the act of description and the situation described overlap, when telling and happening are simultaneous.¹⁵ This confluence of telling and happening creates a parity between the character's experience and the reader's. Reader and character move blindly forward together.

The present tense might free a character from the weight of inevitability created by the past tense. When I read the past tense everything is already settled and is being recounted. The prose rolls out from the end towards me, from the known past.

When I read the present tense there is the illusion that the ending has yet to be decided. The prose rolls out from the present away from me, towards the future. The form of the book always testifies to the fact that the narrative will stop.

Does the character demonstrate different modes of attention? Could their perception of reality be described as more or less present tense?

Instead of portraying a character in the present tense, could I try to see character as an expression of the present tense? Might present tense be a way of being or a mode of attention as well as a linguistic aspect?

The character has chronic indecision – are they expressing a present tense mode of being?

14. LEWIS TURCO, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Non-fiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship*, s.v. 'peripeteia' (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 100.

15. BERNARD COMRIE, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*, (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics; Cambridge: CUP, 1976), [online facsimile], <<https://user.phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de/~filip/Comrie.Aspect.pdf>>, accessed 12 July 2016, p. vii.

I replay the memory. The psychological geometry of the classroom goes soft. Everyone is lost, staring as Mark drinks a bottle of black ink. Swallowing again and again. Am I the only one who remembers this? Perhaps his performance is also replayed in the minds of other adults, then infants, suddenly silenced, gaping all at once. We are all his as he tilts his head to drain the bottle and satisfy what? A thirst for us: for our queasy respect, our total looking, our hush. And, even now, I still feel like he is doing this to me, or for me, as if he is trying to show me something or I am being initiated by him into a secret, even though I know he is just a memory.

The scene is short. The teacher is absent, fetching paper, when Mark walks to the front of the classroom where, in plain view, he drinks a bottle of ink before returning to his seat. Mark drank bottles of black ink. We all knew. If everyone knew, there must have been more than one occasion, more than two, as many times as it takes to go from incident to event. And the gesture keeps on growing and persisting: enlarging his black tongue by retelling.

Then, after years of remembering Mark, I see him. I can't quite place his face but a slow queue in the post office keeps me close for long enough to be sure be-

7. Mark: Redescribing the Published Study

Mark opens with a compressed statement, four words describe the past in the present 'I replay the memory'. This particular memory belongs to the 'I' of a narrator who rewinds and screens the memory again and again in their mind and on the page. Replaying is what the writing *does*. The memory concerns a boy called Mark who the narrator witnessed drinking black ink in a busy classroom at school. The narrator's attention is initially focused on what the gesture did, and continues to do to the witnesses, the boy himself is not yet the priority. Despite the title, Mark begins in the distance as a footnote to a gesture.

The 'I' of the narrator takes centre stage, and as if isolated by a spotlight, s/he glances around for the rest of the cast, for the 'us' from the classroom to join in. The first paragraph takes a doubtful tone, the narrator wonders 'Am I the only one who remembers this?' Is the memory in anyone else's head? The narrator suspects the memory has a hidden plurality held by a disparate community. In *Can Witnesses Speak?* artist and essayist Hito Steyerl identifies the legal value of multiple witnessing, 'An old Roman rule of law stated: *testis unus, testis nullus* – one witness is no witness. At least two witnesses must give concurrent statements to grant credibility to a report.'¹ Other witnesses are called upon but fail to appear. The narrator asks what other witnesses experienced but allows the sentences to drift back to 'I'.

The narrator's mind is the operative space. In *Minding Out* Adam Phillips asks, 'If we picture the mind as an orifice then we cannot help but wonder what it should be open to and what it should be open for. And how it, or rather we, make such vital decisions.'² What enters or escapes the narrator's mind, its water-tightness or leakiness, is an ongoing query. Slowly the narrator's porous mind becomes aligned with the image of Mark's head filling with ink. Two heads, two orifices are connected by a transgressive event in a classroom. Writing as a process of re-playing and re-viewing joins these two heads on the page.

'Am I the only one who remembers this?' also reaches outwards towards me, the reader. The question has an exclamatory tone: this incident is impossible to forget! The question's blunt intonation edges towards direct address. I, the reader, can never know the answer – am I being asked to acknowledge rather than verify the incident? The phrase 'the only one' expresses a dubious isolation, as if an unshared memory is easily dismissed. From the word go this memory is unstable because it is

1. HITO STEYERL, 'Can Witnesses Speak? On the Philosophy of the Interview', *The Witness*, eds. Elena Volpato, Paolo Caffoni (Berlin: Archive, 2010), 191.

2. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Minding Out', *Promises Promises* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 161.

I replay the memory. The psychological geometry of the classroom goes soft. Everyone is lost, staring as Mark drinks a bottle of black ink. Swallowing again and again. Am I the only one who remembers this? Perhaps his performance is also replayed in the minds of other adults, then infants, suddenly silenced, gaping all at once. We are all his as he tilts his head to drain the bottle and satisfy what? A thirst for us: for our queasy respect, our total looking, our hush. And, even now, I still feel like he is doing this to me, or for me, as if he is trying to show me something or I am being initiated by him into a secret, even though I know he is just a memory.

The scene is short. The teacher is absent, fetching paper, when Mark walks to the front of the classroom where, in plain view, he drinks a bottle of ink before returning to his seat. Mark drank bottles of black ink. We all knew. If everyone knew, there must have been more than one occasion, more than two, as many times as it takes to go from incident to event. And the gesture keeps on growing and persisting: enlarging his black tongue by retelling.

Then, after years of remembering Mark, I see him. I can't quite place his face but a slow queue in the post office keeps me close for long enough to be sure be-

held in a single mind. The question inclines almost to an appeal: will you, my reader, become complicit in my remembering? The replaying of memory in words is a theme articulated throughout as repetition. For example, ‘Swallowing again and again [...]’ or ‘We all knew. If everyone knew [...]’. These repetitions create momentum and keep resuscitating the memory.

The ink drinking is described as almost a physical form of possession – Mark drinks his witnesses, ‘We are all his as he tilts his head to drain the bottle and satisfy what? A thirst for us [...]’. The narrator is swallowed, *done to*, albeit in his or her mind and now, through the printed word, I am also consumed. The bizarre intensity of the action spurs repetition. Mark is identified by this peculiar act and his name becomes synonymous with swallowing ink.³ Then the narrative moves from the space of the narrator’s mind, their recollections and speculations into the social world. Mark appears in the Post Office queue and counterbalances the narrator’s fragile solipsism with his actual presence. And his presence subtly shifts the category of the action from an incident to a gesture: ‘gesture’ being a more personal, expressive form.

The close physical proximity of the narrator to Mark makes it possible to identify him and force a conversation. This section, marked by a paragraph break, is told with the velocity and compression of an anecdote. In his essay on the value of anecdotes in new historicism the literary critic Joel Fineman describes the purchase anecdotes have on the ‘real’:

The anecdote, let us provisionally remark, as the narration of a singular event, is the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real. This is not as trivial an observation as might at first appear. It reminds us, on the one hand, that the anecdote has something literary about it, for there are, of course, other and non-literary ways to make reference to the real – through direct description, ostention, definition etc. – that are not anecdotal. On the other hand, it reminds us also that there is something about the anecdote that exceeds its literary status, and this excess is precisely that which gives the anecdote its pointed, referential access to the real; a summary, for example, of some portion of a novel, however brief and pointed, is, again, not something anecdotal.⁴

In this ‘real’ section of *Mark* the anecdotal voice promises safe ground, rooting the narrative thus far in a social occurrence.

The brevity of the telling indicates a real time pressure around the encounter, the narrator spots an opportunity to end the spiral of ink-drinking-thinking. Mark himself can corroborate the memory. S/he asks, ‘Do you remember drinking ink in school?’ the answer stops the narrator in their tracks or puts her/him on different tracks. Mark’s

3. JAMES WOOD, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 89.

4. JOEL FINEMAN, ‘The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction’, *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), 56.

fore I speak. I lean over his shoulder and say, 'Mark?' He turns. He has to work to recognise me but when he does he stares and I stare back mocking his surprise, then he stops staring and tries to make an effort with what is quickly fading to less than interest. His blonde hair is shorn close, as I remember, and under his jacket, he explains, is a strip: now he coaches football in schools. The thought is there all along and as we exhaust polite conversation I ask because there is nothing else left, I say, 'Do you remember drinking ink in school?' I am deliberately vague; **embarrassed** by how much thought I have given the incident over the years. He is instantly overcast, 'That's a pretty extreme thing to do. Whatever was going on for that kid, *not me*, must have been unbearable: probably a situation at home or trouble with teachers. What a **shame.**' Mark is saying he did not drink a bottle of black ink. Exactly the same hair, exactly the same features, exactly undoing my memory: the same boy but now subtracting himself from the incident. I frown up at him, searching for cracks of untruth but his face is sound. Unwittingly or not, Mark turns my question around, sending me back to my memory, leaving the action of drinking ink unclaimed and unmoored.

I stop retelling the incident and **interrogate** myself. I believe Mark; I do not believe Mark. I search the memory for another root or a **hidden motivation**. I feel **shamed** by his compassion for the child *not him*. I have ideas about the drinking; after much research I discover the technical term for consuming the ined-

answer is more than a denial. He is not the protagonist s/he remembers and his heartfelt concern for Mark, the boy who drank ink, makes the narrator's interest seem trite, even distasteful. The narrative develops a moral dimension: should an incident involving a vulnerable boy be told? If so, in what form, from whose perspective and in whose voice? A tension is created between the narrator's desire to corroborate the incident and concern for the boy expressed by Mark in the Post Office. 'He is instantly overcast', not by the gratuity of the question, but by the desperate communication of a child in trouble. His reply ends with the phrase '[...] what a shame' insinuating the question of shame into the narrator's train of thought. Should s/he be ashamed of lacking compassion? A new character emerges from this narrative turn: a vulnerable boy who drinks ink in order to be noticed.

Mark's denial ruptures the narrator's assumptions, 'I frown up at him, searching for cracks of untruth but his face is sound'. Mark's answer blocks the narrator's imposition of character upon him, halting the anecdote. Mark refuses to be objectified by the narrator. In Melville's character study *Bartleby, The Scrivener – A Story of Wall Street* Bartleby resists the demands of his fellow characters and the oppression of the narrative itself. Bartleby would 'prefer not to'⁵ succumb to the internal pressures of the narrative and the narrator, and by implication the author himself.

There is another aspect to Mark's negative answer, if the protagonist of the act does not remember then the question of the memory's authenticity remains moot. If he can't verify the memory no one can, the pursuit of verification becomes absurd. The narrator has also been unkind to Mark – why ask a question that could retrieve shame? The narrator is ashamed of the obsessional thought given to the incident. The need to verify what happened has obscured the ethics of putting the incident onto the page in the first place.

In "*The Indignity of Speaking for Others*": *An Imaginary Interview* the art critic Craig Owens interviews himself, asking whether artists under the influence of the continental philosophers have problematized the activity of representation. He answers thus:

In our culture there is, of course, no lack of representations of women – or, for that matter, of other marginalized groups (blacks, homosexuals, children, criminals, the insane...). However, it is precisely in being represented by the dominant culture that these groups have been rendered absences within it. Thus, it is not the ideological content of representations of these Others that is at issue. Nor do contemporary artists oppose their own representations to existing ones; they do not subscribe to the fallacy of the positive image. (To do so would be to oppose some "true" representivity to a "false" one.) Rather, these artists challenge the activity of representation itself which, by denying them speech,

5. HERMAN MELVILLE, *Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*, [Gutenberg edn.] (Salt Lake City: Gutenberg, 2004), < <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11231/11231.txt>>, accessed 5 Aug. 2014.

ible is 'pica.' There was a swagger to the ink drinking, the blunt and absurd masculinity of a big man necking a shot. If a child can drink ink he can probably do worse, he had probably seen a lot worse. I did nothing to stop the incident, the moment created a strange immobility. I stop pointing and staring, I stop objectifying the child, *not him*, but someone else, someone I feel for, a person Mark does not remember, a person Mark has never been, or is no longer, a character whose actions have no reality beyond my words.

Who does the gesture belong to now?

Someone, *not him*, drank ink. Two truths side-by-side: Mark's and mine, a paradox. Perhaps the gesture is more mine than his after our conversation in the queue. He, the character who drinks ink over and over in my head, knows something: knows drinking ink produces words, provokes surplus feelings seeking release, believes his performance warrants telling after school on the way home, and the opposite, by forging unspeakable secrets he keeps his gesture on our minds long after everything is over. The telling, or not telling, inflates the action; description is the purpose, words keeping the gesture alive.

You must not walk around the classroom without permission. Each table is an island and each child is tightly tucked in around the circumference. Stretching out between us is the space in which the next thing happens, the table's big, smooth emptiness

consciousness, the ability to represent themselves, stand indicted as the primary agent of their domination.⁶

The encounter with Mark returns the narrative to the space of the narrator's mind, speculation continues but along different lines. Guilt about the retelling of the incident is voiced, s/he 'interrogates' her/himself for 'hidden motivation'. What follows is a suggestion that the character only exists as words on a page as '[...] a character whose actions have no reality beyond my words.' This sentence marks a subtle transition from *narrator* to *writer*. The writer senses the ethical problems of representing another and tries to find another way round. Once Mark appears in 'everyday life' power in the hands of the writer disempowers the person represented. The writing continues without the 'real' Mark leaving the gesture of ink drinking unmoored.

Another direct address 'Who does the gesture belong to now?' echoes the question at the start 'Am I the only one who remembers this?' In the first paragraph the ink drinking is described as Mark possessing the witnesses. If the gesture is not Mark's (the Mark in the Post Office) then the possession is by someone else, a figment or an invention or, as the last sentence suggests, *something* else: '[...] description is the purpose, words keeping the gesture alive'. Gesture and description are wound in the same skein. What kind of gesture is description? Is the narrator possessed by the rhetorical power of retelling the gesture?

There are as many versions of the ink drinking as there are relationships to Mark. In fact Mark multiplies as the narrative develops. Mark moves from being a figure in a memory, to a person materialised, to a boy empathised with and eventually becomes a character – a figment of the writer's imagination – present only in words on a page. Each Mark is not erased by the subsequent Marks, he is revealed as an accumulating palimpsest.

The first section ends with Mark being acknowledged as a character in the writer's imagination, 'He, the character who drinks ink over and over in my head [...]'. At this point the tone changes from a self-reflective monologue, an elongated dash marks the entrance of a new voice. The opening sentence is an injunction, 'You must not walk around the classroom without permission.' This slippery pronoun is used to address those in the classroom and to encompass and involve me who is reading. In fact 'You' dissolves the *you* who is reading into the *you* who is subject to the rules of the classroom. Then 'You' is superseded by 'us'. The 'I' of the writer is replaced by a voice that speaks as 'us'. 'Us' is used ten times in the space of two pages along with 'we' and 'our' – the voice is collectively speaking on behalf of other witnesses.

6. Craig Owens, "'The Indignity of Speaking for Others': An Imaginary Interview", *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, eds. Craig Owens, Scott Stewart Bryson (Berkeley: UCP, 1994), 262.

is exciting. She, the teacher, is above **us** or at a distance, or with the table next to **us**, or suddenly towering beside me helping and showing. And she is sort of shocking when her woman's face is big and close and smiling straight at **you**. She continues over there at another table always near but now theirs. Then, for a couple of minutes, she is round a corner, down a corridor, in a store cupboard.

He notices.

He gets up and walks forwards. Some of **us**, twisting on our seats, look to the front where the desk, hers but she is not there, is alone beside him. He, as if disappointed, casts around for a purpose: now he is there; something must happen. Trailing one eye over her desk, he searches for something he might want: **we** are engrossed in his curiosity. His hand steers our attention to the pencil sharpener, to the glue, to the rubbers and up off the desk as he lifts a bottle from a stained tray. Squeezed and twisted, the cap releases, shedding black dust on his fingers. He peers in gently tipping the jar, swilling to discover the depth, guessing how much there is in the darkness to swallow. He looks up at **us** stuck in the middle of his performance, feeling the fact of no way back.

The bottleneck slots into place behind his teeth: the rim is a good fit. Now, hands free, he stretches his arms wide reaching out for **us**; opening his chest and knocks his head back. His skull rolls back then locks reaching the limits of his spine. Resting with his head fallen back behind him, the bottle is now

The event of drinking ink now unfolds in the present tense from the perspective of a child but the syntax and vocabulary belong to an adult: an adult seeing through a child's eyes. The memory is experienced in slow motion but this is prose so the remembering slows down through the motion of language. Psychological affects and the precise spatial features of the classroom are rendered in detail. The class follow Mark's movements to the front of the classroom. Suddenly aware that he is commanding attention he improvises, 'Trailing one eye over her desk, he searches for something he might want: we are engrossed in his curiosity.' The children's attention fuses with Mark's via an array of objects on the teacher's desk. This merging of psychological spaces ushers in a shift in the prose. The attention narrows to Mark's body, the ink drinking becomes a sensorial inventory of angles, body parts and kinesics, 'Now, hands free, he stretches his arms wide reaching out for us; opening his chest and knocks his head back. His skull rolls back then locks reaching the limits of his spine.'

The class become unified by Mark, 'He uses his eyes on us, bringing us back together as his audience.' In the last paragraph of this visceral section, the shift from 'us' to 'we' marks a transition from passive to active: from the class as an object that is *done to* to a subject that *does*. What the gesture achieves is awareness of the mobility of power. The order, given by the teacher, 'You must not walk around the classroom without permission' is overturned by a pupil's gesture, 'He has delivered a lesson in risky liberty and we cannot think of anything else.' Where there was the passivity of 'us' there is now a group of children who form a suspicious 'we'. Like the final section of *Emmet*, *Mark* also contains a transition that leads to a more active and autonomous group. The workshop in *Emmet* and the class in *Mark* frame transformations. In both studies educational scenarios facilitate the growth of characters.

One of the other features of this section is that 'Mark' is never written. The proper noun is replaced by 'he' the pronoun. This switch changes the pace. By removing the obstacle of the proper noun the prose develops more fluidly. Witnessing becomes enmeshed with the physicality of gesturing body parts, 'Widening, opening, without blinking, his black lips, black teeth, black tongue uncurls under the tip of his nose. Poured into the centre of his milky white face is a deep, black hole.' When the drinking is broken down into discreet actions 'he' is liberated from 'Mark'. A relational space of witnessing unfettered by identity opens up. This is remembering how what happened *felt*. Under the subheading of *The Pain of the Other*, Hito Steyerl writes:

Witnesses not only report on the world, but also first produce it in a social and political sense. If we want to overcome the solipsism of our individual experiences, we cannot do without witnessing.⁷

7. HITO STEYERL, 'Can Witnesses Speak? On the Philosophy of the Interview', *The Witness*, ed. Elena Volpato (Berlin: Archive Books, 2010), 194-195.

inverted above his mouth emptying into him. Then he flops forwards, hanging his head as if expired, the bottle suspended from his lips. Turning away, he stretches his mouth and closes his eyes, concentrating on carefully freeing the bottle from behind his teeth. He screws the cap back and returns the bottle soundlessly.

Now, he turns his face on **us**: his white skin visible under a rough haircut, each blonde follicle crew cut too close. His skull is special and harsh predicting more to come. He uses his eyes on **us**, bringing **us** back together as his audience. Widening, opening, without blinking, his black lips, black teeth, black tongue uncurls under the tip of his nose. Poured into the centre of his milky white face is a deep, black hole. He snaps his mouth into a shut smile and walks back to his place.

In she comes, into the disturbance, catching sight of **our** faces and him on his feet. She asks him to be seated and he shows her his back. He sucks on ink avoiding our glances. **We** are scattered, she senses the disorder: **we** see she notices **we** are not the same, our feeble responses tell her so. **We** are not so sure of her. Things have happened while she was out. How do **we** follow them when we are not sure if they are even over yet? Inside him, still with **us**, the ink keeps moving darkening his corners. He can stand where she stands, he does what he wants and nobody stops him. He has delivered a lesson in risky liberty and **we** cannot think of anything else.

On the whole, discerning a witness represents an attempt to open oneself up to the experiences of others. It is a step in the direction of coping with the paradoxical task that Wittgenstein once so vividly described: feeling the pain in the body of the other.⁸

Mark's body becomes a space of agency and he draws everyone inwards towards him. Afterwards the class is in disarray. The teacher returns but their minds have been darkened. In *You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: On the Risk of Bearing Witness and the Art of Affective Labour* Jan Verwoert describes the challenges of bearing witness in relation to the psychoanalytic concept of transference:⁹

Let me try to rephrase this question of witnessing in terms of social economy. It then presents itself in the form of the nexus between two *economies of transference*: In the primary economy of transference, what is passed on to a witness are unresolved emotions that one can't cope with (or make sense of) because they're simply too intense. Traditionally, the primary economy that enables and regulates this transference is the *oikos* itself, the household, the family [...]¹⁰

The second economy of transference complements the first, but operates on the principle of externalisation. Here, an outsider, a third person, is cast in the role of the witness, so that those primarily affected can unburden themselves by shifting the weight of their unresolved relations onto someone else.¹¹

In light of Verwoert's placement of witnessing as part of the processes of transference, *Mark* starts to read as a document of two transferences: emotions are transferred from Mark to the narrator and from the writer to me who is reading.

This section ends in a confounded silence, 'He has delivered a lesson in risky liberty and we cannot think of anything else.' The silence is followed by a flight to adulthood in the shape of an interview. Three questions are answered by a new Mark with an adult vocabulary. The voice is closer to that established by the narrator. The interview is in the present tense but refers to the ink drinking as if looking back on what just happened in the narrative. Questions raised by the ink drinking are posed *and* answered by the writer. 'Questions are always a queer species of prediction'¹² and the writer enters a kind of echo chamber. But the writer is not trying to *be* Mark, s/he is thinking *through* him. This new Mark offers a grown-up explanation. The gesture

8. HITO STEYERL, 'Can Witnesses Speak? On the Philosophy of the Interview', *The Witness*, ed. Elena Volpato (Berlin: Archive Books, 2010), 195.

9. CHARLES RYCROFT, *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. 'transference' (2nd edn., London: Penguin, 1995), 185–186.

10. JAN VERWOERT, 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: On the Risk of Bearing Witness and the Art of Affective Labour', *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, ed. Vanessa Ohlraun (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 257–258.

11. *Ibid.* 258.

12. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'The Master-Mind Lectures', *Side Effects* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006), 4.

What does ink taste like?

Dry. Like you might have swallowed nothing.

What is it like to pick your moment?

It is as if everybody and everything suddenly agrees with you. As if all the arrows have lined up and are pointing in your direction. You feel loose and pliable. If you don't have a plan nothing can go wrong and all the tension that goes into wilful action is released. You stop thinking. You see her stand; you stand. You see her take a step towards the door; you take a step forwards. Each step is provisional. You bend to the situation and each action is no more than a response. What I feel is relaxed — her absence, even for a few seconds, is a relief. And I notice, perhaps because the tension lessens, that we, the class, have nothing to do. In between one thing and the next, we are empty-handed and ready. This faint potential gathering amongst us pushes me forwards into her wake where, in her absence, I feel instantly more myself.

Do you want everyone to know what you did, or do you want to keep it hidden?

The gesture is too provocative, too productive, to be hidden. I don't want to own the gesture in the way you want me to. Opportunistic gestures never feel like mine — being formed, as they are, within a bigger picture — they belong more to a situation than to a person.

is given a specific meaning but not one that could be ascribed to the Mark from the Post Office. This section has the summative tone of a coda and attempts the certainty of answers. In the short essay *An Answer to Questions* Adam Phillips describes what a question might be in developmental terms:

People as the animals that question themselves – who doubt and judge and punish – has been one of our most spellbinding images and projects. As though questions signified the transition from nature to culture; as though culture turns appetite into a question; as though bringing up children is getting them to put some question marks in.¹³

The narrator-writer interrogates themselves in much the same way Craig Owens interviews himself about the ethics of representation. What this self-interrogation reveals is the limits of the narrator-writer's empathy with Mark: behind these questions is a determination to keep making Mark up no matter what.

In *Emmet* there is a gestalt exercise that involves chewing but not swallowing bread, there the act of swallowing is synonymous with introjection and ingestion is a metaphor for compliance. 'Swallowing one's pride' or 'swallowing a bitter pill' express this in idioms. The answer to the first question reanimates earlier doubts, suggesting that ink was not swallowed. Appearing to swallow the ink implies a trick. Not swallowing amounts to resistance: resisting orderly, institutional learning, in this case embodied by a female teacher – as with *Emmet* authority takes the form of a woman. The gesture is offered as an improvisation and the writer reworks Mark as an opportunist, surprised by his own actions and the way the situation pans out. The writer prevents Mark from taking credit or blame because 'opportunistic gestures' belong to the realm of contingency. If the gesture has a root or a source it can be traced back to a lapse in attention between tasks given by the teacher where the children are receptive, 'ready' with 'faint potential'. The situation in the classroom is a panopticon, Mark feels repressed by the watchful eye of the teacher, the teacher's absence is a trigger, with the class unoccupied his movements ignite interest. Mark steps into the teacher's shoes and manipulates his peers in an startling way. Authority weakens and power shifts.

Swallowing ink is preserved by this narrative. The gesture becomes ink on the page. As is the case at the start of *Emmet*, 'nothing' is written many times in Mark's last answer. 'Nothing' operates as fertile ground, in much the same way as boredom sponsors desire.¹⁴ Heads and minds are also a motif counterbalanced by visceral

13. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'An Answer to Questions', *Promises Promises* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 179.

14. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'On Being Bored', *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 81.

Two situations are possible, she is in or she is out of the room. I feel different in or out of her sight. She is not benign. You don't see that, or you only register a mild resentment towards her as she advances her rules upon you. You only give the situation a passing thought, not even a thought just a rough glance but I feel her order, her structure pressing down on me. She imposes limits and then there is space beyond where my gesture is performed, making the limits visible, memorable and vivid.

Everyone should know that our limitless horizon of play is narrowing. I, for one, do not like the transition. This gesture, drinking ink, is a response to a new regime of anti-play, to the division of time into increments called lessons and our inevitable education. Swallowing ink produces words but leaves **nothing** to write with, provoking under the breath and behind the hand the wrong words in the wrong way.

bodies. In his article *Mind and Its Relation to the Psyche-Soma*¹⁵ Winnicott proposes the physical and the mental as integrated into a 'psyche-soma' in normal developing individuals.¹⁶ The mind does not exist as such, what we come to think of as mind is an excessive reaction to impingement upon the individual's 'continuity of being'.¹⁷ Adam Phillips redescribes and extends Winnicott's theory of mind to link turbulent experiences with the need to know:

As we shall see, the mind-object is that figure in the internal world that has to believe – and go on proving, usually by seeking accomplices – that there is no such thing as a body with needs. It [mind-object] is a fiction invented to solve the problem [of] wanting to make the turbulence disappear.¹⁸

Developmentally, Winnicott suggests, there was a time before the mind, when there was nothing to know about and no need to know. Once there is the trauma of impingement – once, as at birth, the environment becomes excessively demanding – the mind appears. But, as Winnicott implies, the mind is trying to know something that is not subject to knowing (like trying to look at something with one's mouth).¹⁹

To sabotage the mind becomes a way of returning to the body.²⁰

A persistent memory haunting the mental space of the narrator-writer is transformed into bodily descriptions of a gesture. Mark is the name for a difficult memory being replayed, re-enacted, multiplied and transformed through words on a page.

In Padgett Powell's novel *The Interrogative Mood*²¹ an incessant stream of questions constitute its prose. What this book makes clear is the Janus-faced nature of questions. Questions flatter, they're a direct address which give form to curiosity but they are also motivated by a need to know, and they prescribe the delivery of that knowledge as an answer. Powell's interrogative mood is disturbing because questions with no answers expose the coercive power of the question as a form. *Mark* has this interrogative mood. The narrator's pursuit of a memory is quickly replaced by the writer's pursuit of answers. Remembering through writing leads to the ethics of characters based on real people. Moving characters out of the writer's head and onto the page is complicated by Mark's physical presence. But as Jan Verwoert argues the 'radical, ethical demands'²²

15. D.W. WINNICOTT, 'Mind and Its Relation to the Psyche-Soma', in *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 27/4 (Sep. 1954), 201–209.

16. Ibid. 201.

17. Ibid. 202.

18. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Minds', *Terrors and Experts* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 93.

19. Ibid. 101.

20. Ibid.

21. PADGETT POWELL, *The Interrogative Mood* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2011).

22. JAN VERWOERT, 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: On the Risk of Bearing Witness and the Art of Affective Labour', *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, ed. Vanessa

of witnessing are a messy kind of affective labour which releases feelings back into circulation:

Bearing witness goes beyond making meaning. It's avowal of that which may be inexpressible or even impossible to share when what one feels is also felt by the other. Beyond meaning lies feeling. And feeling someone feel what you feel makes all the difference. It can stop you from going mad. Madness is the product of the unavowed. Mutually acknowledged feelings, be they painful or joyful, are something one can act towards.²³

The atmosphere of *Mark* is restless. By seeking Mark the writer-narrator becomes increasingly entangled with him and he becomes increasingly obscured. Mark works like a labyrinth in which the writer-narrator plays hide and seek with the ethics of representation. Trying to verify him but also trying to fictionalise him. The narrator-writer is Mark's witness but this witnessing produces difficult feelings that are exorcised as writing – writing which records how character is always an imposition from the outside.

Ohlraun (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 255.

23. Ibid. 264.

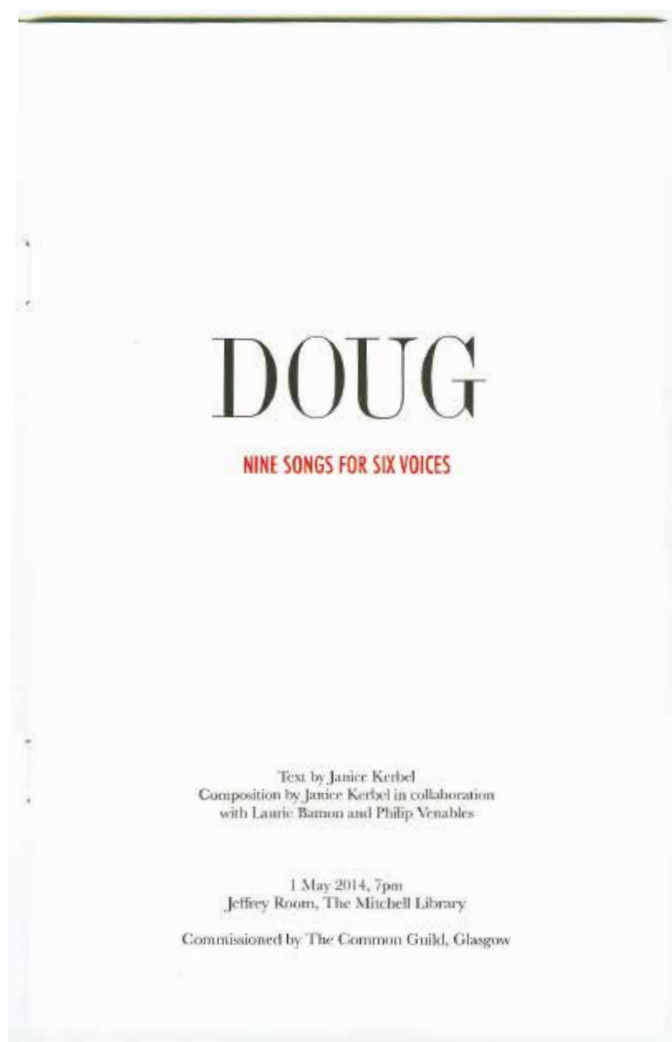


PLATE 2. JANICE KERBEL, *DOUG: Nine Songs for Six Voices*, 2014. Performance programme. 148 x 210 mm.

8. *Mark*: Redescribing the Writing Process

Mark began with a memory of an incident at school and my doubts about whether I should be using the memory as the subject of fictional prose. *Mark* was developed in response to three works: the performative artwork *DOUG*¹ by Janice Kerbel (briefly discussed in Chapter 5), the novel *The Hour of the Star*² by Clarice Lispector and the novel *Mezzanine*³ by Nicholson Baker. I began writing *Mark* wondering what the limits of a character study could be.

As mentioned earlier, I saw the seminal performance of Janice Kerbel's musical composition *DOUG* followed by a lecture by Kerbel at The Glasgow School of Art.⁴ To recap, *DOUG* used character to structure a composition sung by six voices. Nine lyrical descriptions of accidents: *blast, fall, hit, gag, bear attack, crash, strike, sink* and *slip* were sung by six classically trained vocalists. The properties of each voice evoked the physicality of the accidents and expressed the onomatopoeic content of the libretto. The character of Doug was used to lasso these nine episodes. The musical score was commissioned by The Common Guild but the artwork had been in development since 2012 through a project titled *Our Mutual Friends* which celebrated Charles Dickens' Bicentenary.⁵ I was initially struck by the graphic simplicity of the title (see PLATE 2) and the way the name provided me with a clear approach to the work. Watching *DOUG* synchronised with writing the final drafts of *Emmet* and beginning *Mark*.

This is how *DOUG* is described on the Common Guild website, "DOUG" is a musical composition for unaccompanied voice that chronicles a continuous stream of nine catastrophic events endured by a single individual'.⁶ 'Chronicling' the events 'endured' by an individual suggests the accidents are registered on impact with Doug; he is the matter the accidents are expressed through: the accidents are the real protagonists. As I was coming to the end of writing *Emmet* I could see that he, like Doug, was predominantly passive. I was already aware of Kerbel's series of prints

1. JANICE KERBEL, *DOUG: Nine Songs for Six Voices* [performance], composition Janice Kerbel in collaboration with Laurie Bamon, Philip Venables (Glasgow: Common Guild, 2014), performed in Glasgow at the Mitchell Library, Jeffrey Room, 1 May 2014.

2. CLARICE LISPECTOR, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992).

3. NICHOLSON BAKER, *The Mezzanine* (London: Granta, 2011).

4. Janice Kerbel interviewed by Kitty Anderson, recorded at The Glasgow School of Art's *Friday Event* by the Common Guild, 2 May 2014, (mp3).

5. FILM AND VIDEO UMBRELLA, *Our Mutual Friends* [website], (2012) <<http://ourmutualfriends.com>>, accessed 6 Aug. 2015.

6. THE COMMON GUILD, 'Janice Kerbel "DOUG"', *The Common Guild* [website], 1 May 2014, <<https://www.thecommonguild.org.uk/programme/project/doug>>, accessed 29 July 2015.

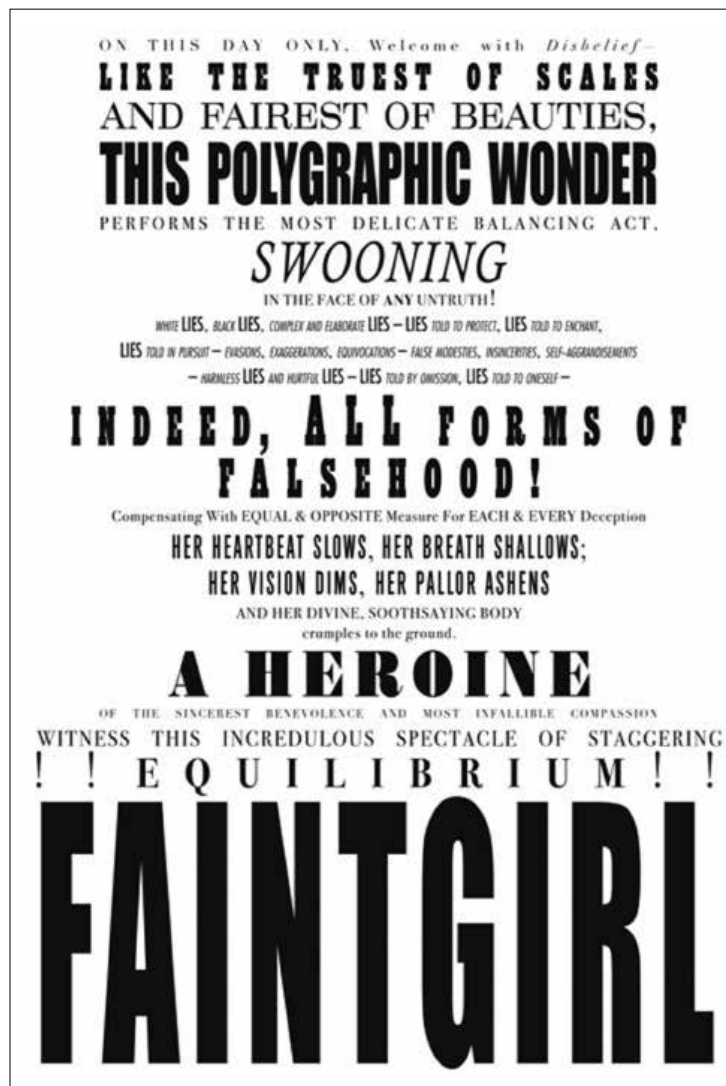


PLATE 3. JANICE KERBEL, *Remarkable: Faintgirl*, 2007.
Silkscreen print on campaign poster paper. 107 x 158 cm.

*Remarkable*⁷ which are also arguably character studies. In conversation with Kitty Anderson of the Common Guild at The Glasgow School of Art, Kerbel discussed writing practice and inhabiting forms.⁸ The chronological structure of the lecture enabled me to see how her characters emerged through a series of artworks over time, each work taking multiple forms including: scripts, prints, events and books. In the lecture Kerbel stated how writing led her towards an interest in character:

In the move from *Underwood* to *Nick Silver* I knew I wanted to find a way to write more ambitiously. It took me a while to figure out how to do that or to find a form. I wanted to inhabit a form and I think that's what I do in most of the works that I make because I don't feel like I have any loyalty to one specific material or medium. So rather I look to forms I can somehow inhabit and adapt from within. I became interested in radio plays. So I began writing a radio play where the characters of the play were nocturnal plants. It was voiced in their voices but all the characteristics of the characters in the play were derived out of trying to understand what these plants were, what their needs might be.⁹

In response to a commission for Frieze Art Fair, Kerbel printed the series of five posters titled *Remarkable*. Each poster described a character in the typographic language of the fairground side show, for example *Faintgirl* faints whenever she encounters a deception (see PLATE 3). Kerbel described the evolution of this artwork:

For me the only way I could begin to think about it [the Frieze commission] was to find a form that made sense in that context. That is when I began to think about the idea of the side show or fairground ephemera.¹⁰

The idea of the fairground attraction is motivated by the idea of excess. The more eccentric or the more impossible the act or the figure the truer it is. I found that fascinating because it is almost permission for the impossible. When I made them I wanted the characters themselves to get absolutely trapped. Not trapped in a negative way but they only live in the space of the poster. Because, of course, you are only going to be disappointed if... and so I liked that, that this was their form.¹¹

Each of them were physical manifestations of some kind of invisible phenomena, that is how I came to think of them.¹²

Kerbel's rendering of the *Remarkable* characters into black and white typographic form and her use of hyperbolic gestures, for example fainting, gave me a new perspective

7. JANICE KERBEL, *Remarkable* [prints] (London: Frieze Art Fair, 11–14 Oct. 2007).

8. JANICE KERBEL interviewed by KITTY ANDERSON, recorded at The Glasgow School of Art's *Friday Event* by the Common Guild, 2 May 2014, (mp3).

9. Ibid. 14:44–15:50.

10. Ibid. 24:50–25:02.

11. Ibid. 25:20–26:17.

12. Ibid. 26:22–26:31.

on the boy drinking black ink at school. I had previously attempted to write about the incident from the boy's perspective but I wanted to approach the gesture as independent of him. If Kerbel's characters 'only lived in the space of the poster' what space would the boy live in? The space of my memory?

In response to a question by Kitty Anderson about where *DOUG* came from Kerbel replied:

He didn't come from anywhere particularly interesting apart from the name. I had heard this joke and for some reason it had stayed with me: what do you call a man with a spade in his head? You call him Doug. I don't know if I found it funny but I liked the idea that a name could indicate an incident.¹³

I had been watching a lot of cartoons, Looney Tunes and things like this. And that was what was always happening, this terrible event and then everything is fine, the coyote gets back up. And I found that both really thrilling and perplexing as a form, these forms could be constantly regenerated.¹⁴

The boy's name was Mark, this name had become synonymous with ink drinking, he had been labelled as 'the boy who drinks ink' by the school's community. I was interested in 'regenerating' him by changing perspective and making new versions of Mark. I was also reflecting on Emmet as a character on the run, a character in flight from his character. He is immobilised by his girlfriend's point of view, experiencing her expectations as an imposition. I started to think about character less as a situation and more as a point of view, or multiple points of view. In fiction these points of view are unlimited, they can be exterior or interior to characters, human or non-human. Narrative brings multiple points of view into contact with each other. Multiple characters can be anchored to a single name and this multiplicity does not necessarily amount to duplicity or inauthenticity.

I reflected on the common accusation of 'acting out of character'. Certain gestures can simultaneously denote and disperse character, splitting or multiplying their character or characteristics. An action can frustrate my expectations of a character but also refract them into new forms. An example would be the moment when Mr Phillips, from Lanchester's novel *Mr Phillips*, stands up in the middle of the bank robbery.¹⁵ I was thinking of spectacular rages and unexpected gestures of protest.

Dramatic gestures are often rationalised within narrative, even the most inexplicable gestures tend to be explained by hidden depths. The film director and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini created a character without hidden depths in his film *Theorem*¹⁶ called the

13. JANICE KERBEL interviewed by KITTY ANDERSON, recorded at The Glasgow School of Art's *Friday Event* by the Common Guild, 2 May 2014, (mp3), 49:02–49:22.

14. Ibid. 49:35–50:04.

15. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 209.

16. PIER PAOLO PASOLINI (dir.), *Theorem* (British Film Institute, BFIB1166, 1968).

‘Visitor’ who facilitates change in the characters around him whilst maintaining an impenetrable surface. Like Bartleby, his actions feel programmed rather than motivated. The Visitor’s behaviour is invariable, he indiscriminately seduces everyone: the wife, the father, the son, the daughter and the maid who all undergo traumatic life changes. The Visitor acts like a mood or catalyst, sexualising and unravelling each character in turn. Without any discernable personal history the Visitor becomes a surface the other characters project onto.

I began to think of Mark as a surface I was projecting onto, the boy who drank ink had become replaced by a character I fabricated over time. In reality he had demanded my attention in a classroom during the 1970s but what haunted me was his gesture – I had been making him up ever since. I first wrote about the ink drinking because it was graphic, a wordless communication with impact. The gesture was magnetic, words and thoughts stuck to it, and it was witnessed at a point in our education when we were learning to write. The memory of the ink drinking was a hook on which I was able to hang multiple characters. I found the gesture compelling enough to revisit and reimagine.

The ink drinking also linked to other pieces I was working on. In an interview I conducted with a child psychologist to prepare for writing about school refusers she used the word ‘pica’. This is a psychological disorder involving the ingestion of non-nutritional substances like earth or chalk. The psychologist used the term to describe the symptoms of her client. *Mark* became connected to a study titled *Younger Brother*¹⁷ through pica. This affirmative echo acted as a kind of confirmation to keep working on *Mark*. Another connection was writing about mouths: the initial impulse to write *Emmet* came from an exercise taken from Gestalt psychotherapy involving chewing bread. I also found a concern with the instability of memory repeated in *Ben*¹⁸ which begins with rewriting a letter from memory. Like *Mark*, *Ben* uses writing to explore the limits of memory. *Mark* followed in the wake of *Ben* and attempted a more complex re-enactment of past events.

I had encountered a number of problems caused by my unstructured approach to writing *Emmet*: inconsistencies of tense, style and point of view. When writing *Mark* I made an effort to maintain points of view and to be conscious of when and why I was changing tense, style and tone. I was also aware that controlling tense would be essential when examining a past event in the present through a process of writing from different perspectives.

The provisional title for *Mark* was *What to think?* This question was a sanitised

17. SARAH TRIPP, ‘Younger Brother’, *You are of vital importance*, eds. Jane Rolo and Camilla Wills (London: Book Works, 2014), 97.

18. SARAH TRIPP, ‘Ben’, *You are of vital importance*, eds. Jane Rolo and Camilla Wills (London: Book Works, 2014), 48.

version of a messier question: how should I think about my desire to write about this incident? The anxious word in this question is *should*. My desire to write about the incident was not altruistic. Any writing would have an ethical dimension and bring ethical challenges. I stepped back and considered who should narrate. The ‘I’ of the writer would have to feature. I decided to write in the first person and appear as the narrator, and subsequently the writer.

I also referred to Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*¹⁹ and Paul Auster’s *Oracle Night*²⁰ but then I found Clarice Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*.²¹ In this, her last novel concerning poverty in north-eastern Brazil, the central relationship is between a writer and their character. Lispector’s novel is less strategic and more unwieldy but also more unguarded. The novel is narrated by a writer, Rodrigo S. M. who is grappling with the creation of a character called Macabea. The Irish novelist and literary critic Colm Tóibín describes the osmosis between the writer and Macabea:

Nothing is stable in the text. The voice of the narrator moves from the darkest wondering about existence and God to almost comic wandering around in his character; he is watching her, entering her mind, listening to her and then standing back. He is filled with pity and sympathy for her case – her poverty, her innocence, her body, how much she does not know and cannot imagine – but he is also alert to the writing of fiction itself as an activity which demands tricks that he, the poor narrator, simply does not possess, or does not find useful.²²

Rodrigo’s voice is uneven, both analytical and unselfconscious; the narrative tumbles out of him. In the translator’s Afterword to the Carcanet edition of *The Hour of the Star* Giovanni Pontiero comments on the way Lispector’s writes to her reader:

Her asides to the reader, as distractions, uncertainties, and obstacles interrupt the creative process, underline the attendant problems as the writer struggles for direction and clarification. They also show how a writer may question the validity of the characters in a narrative even after those characters have assumed an independent existence. On occasion, their development may even run at a tangent to the author’s original intentions. For, once the creative process is under way, new forces mysteriously exert their influence. The author sometimes tries to retreat, only to discover that it is much too late.²³

19. FLANN O’BRIEN, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Penguin Books, 1960).

20. PAUL AUSTER, *Oracle Night* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

21. CLARICE LISPECTOR, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992).

22. COLM TÓIBÍN, ‘Clarice Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star* is as bewildering as it is brilliant’, *The Guardian* [website], (18 Jan. 2014), < <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/18/clarice-lispector-hour-of-the-star>>, accessed 3 Aug. 2015, para. 10.

23. GIOVANNI PONTIERO, ‘Afterword’, *The Hour of the Star* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 95.

For example, Rodrigo writes:

The definable is making me a little weary. I prefer truths that carry no prophecies. When I eventually rid myself of this story, I shall withdraw to the more arbitrary realm of vague prophecies. I did not invent this girl. She forced her being upon me.²⁴

And then Rodrigo confronts his guilt about making Macabea up:

As for the girl, she exists in an impersonal limbo, untouched by what is worst or best. She merely exists, inhaling and exhaling, inhaling and exhaling. Why should there be anything more? Her existence is sparse. Certainly. But why should I feel guilty? Why should I try to relieve myself of the burden of not having done anything concrete to help the girl? This girl – I see that I have almost started telling my story – this girl who slept in cheap cotton underwear with faint but rather suspicious bloodstains. In an effort to fall asleep on cold wintry nights, she would curl up into a ball, receiving and giving out her own scant warmth. She slept with her mouth wide open because of her stuffed-up nostrils, dead to the world from sheer exhaustion.²⁵

I felt guilty about exploiting Mark, the real person in my school. The guilt became an obstacle to writing *and* the subject of the writing. I wanted to write about the gesture of drinking ink but not at Mark's expense. I wanted to keep the study within the boundary of my memory, to reinvent this incredible gesture but not interpret or depict the 'real' Mark who exists but I've not seen since the 1970s. I felt entitled to write about my memory but I had no right to represent Mark. I reconsidered writing from Mark's perspective or giving Mark a voice. I thought about this while standing in the Post Office queue. I thought about how patronising this would be. I was searching for a circuitous way to claim the gesture. I wanted to 'ethically' write the study. I tried to separate Mark (the real person) from Mark in my memory. I began writing a scene in the Post Office from his perspective, as if *he* had bumped into *me*. There were two problems: I could not imagine Mark's point of view and making him up felt like a lie because he was real.

In an interview with Elissa Schappell for *The Paris Review* the author Toni Morrison describes the ethics of making characters up:

INTERVIEWER: When you create a character is it completely created out of your own imagination?

MORRISON: I never use anyone I know. In *The Bluest Eye* I think I used some gestures and dialogue of my mother in certain places, and a little geography. I've

24. CLARICE LISPECTOR, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 29.

25. Ibid. 23.

never done that since. I really am very conscientious about that. It's never based on anyone. I don't do what many writers do.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

MORRISON: There is this feeling that artists have – photographers more than other people, and writers – that they are acting like a succubus... this process of taking from something that's alive and using it for one's own purposes. You can do it with trees, butterflies or human beings. Making a little life for oneself by scavenging other people's lives is a big question, and it does have moral and ethical implications.

In fiction, I feel the most intelligent, and the most free and the most excited, when my characters are fully invented people. That's part of the excitement. If they're based on somebody else, in a funny way it's an infringement of a copyright. That person *owns* his life, has a patent on it. It shouldn't be available for fiction.²⁶

I made Mark disown the ink drinking incident. If Mark did not drink the ink then anything I had to say about the incident was not a commentary on the 'real' Mark. I was suddenly writing about a memory without a root nested within a fictional scenario. I put my own memory, instead of Mark, in the foreground.

I tried to write a detailed description of the ink drinking. I recalled the sequence of physical, spatial and psychological impressions which were intense but also fragmented. I worked hard to bring these impressions into written form. This process resulted in sentences similar in tone to the description of the chewing bread exercise from *Emmet*. I concentrated on recalling physical sensations, guiding my attention to sensory impressions. Trying to remember sharpened the impressions. I was remembering through writing. The more I wrote the more I felt. The way the memory felt became confused with imagining how the gesture would feel to perform. As my bodily sensations were projected onto him the proper noun 'Mark' disappeared from the sentences. I wanted the physicality of the gesture to be felt. I searched for prose writers who could evoke bodily sensations. My supervisor suggested I read Nicholson Baker's novel *Mezzanine*,²⁷ specifically a scene when the character Howie breaks his shoelace. Having just written an inverted shoelace scene in *Emmet* I pursued the reference.

Mezzanine is told by Howie who works on a mezzanine in an office and goes out to buy a new shoelace. The book begins on his return as he is about to ascend an escalator to his office and ends as he steps onto the mezzanine. Howie recollects his journey up the escalator digressing in 15 chapters. *Mezzanine*, like *Mr Phillips*,²⁸ uses the constraints of time and place to limit the extent of the novel – the book ends when

26. TONI MORRISON interviewed by Elissa Schappell with additional material by Claudia Brodsky Lacour, *The Paris Review Interviews: Women Writers at Work*, ed. George Plimpton (London: Harvill, 1999), 298.

27. NICHOLSON BAKER, *Mezzanine* (London: Granta, 2011).

28. JOHN LANCHESTER, *Mr Phillips* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

Howie steps off the escalator.

What is so sensuous about the first chapter of *Mezzanine* is the detailed descriptions of Howie's foot. How its activities set the scene for the shoelace incident:

As I had worked, then, my foot had, without any sanction from my conscious will, slipped from the untied shoe and sought out the texture of the carpeting: although now, as I reconstruct the moment, I realize that a more specialized desire was at work as well: when you slide a socked foot over a carpeted surface, the fibres of sock and carpet mesh and lock, so that though you think you are enjoying the texture of the carpeting, you are really enjoying the slippage of the inner surface of the sock against the underside of your foot, something you normally get to experience only in the morning when you first pull the sock on.²⁹

The author and reviewer Sam Anderson interviewed Baker for *The Paris Review of Books* introducing him thus, 'Nicholson Baker loves artificial constraints: the clarity they bring to a project, the odd angles and tones they inspire.'³⁰ Anderson asks Baker to describe how these constraints supersede plot:

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been tempted to write books that are a little more orthodox?

BAKER: Oh, absolutely. Before I wrote *The Mezzanine* I tried to write a murder mystery. I've always wanted to write a spy novel. I read a lot of Len Deighton at one time, and a lot of John Dickson Carr.

INTERVIEWER: What happened?

BAKER: Something comes over me in trying to write the opening paragraphs – it's actually a physical sensation of unhappiness. It physically hurts me to plan out a series of reversals, things that will go wrong. It just doesn't come naturally. My murder-mystery plot was extremely elaborate, with lots of strange clues involving balsa wood, and that was going to be fun, I thought. But then there was the dead body. The dead-body part was the thing I just didn't go for. You have to start with it. If you don't have the dead body, you do not have the murder mystery.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't *The Mezzanine*, in a way, just a giant, overcompact mystery novel?

BAKER: It's a novel about the mystery of what life actually is – life when there is no corpse to propel people along and make them lock the door and say, We'll all stay here until we figure it out!³¹

Mezzanine's digressions and copious footnotes read like a 'figuring out' process. Many of the footnotes contain realisations and insights, some almost pedagogical in tone, are learnt over time as Howie accumulates life experiences. With hindsight Howie realises escalators and cars create the same mood:

29. NICHOLSON BAKER, *Mezzanine* (London: Granta, 2011), 12.

30. Nicholson Baker interviewed by Sam Anderson, 'The Art of Fiction No. 212', *The Paris Review* [website], (2011) <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6097/the-art-of-fiction-no-212-nicholson-baker>>, accessed 31 July 2015, para. 1.

31. Ibid. 8th question.

At the time I was riding the escalator to the mezzanine every day. I didn't own a car, but later, when I did, I realized that escalatorial happiness is not too far removed from the standard pleasure that the highway commuter feels driving his warm, quiet box between pulsing intermittencies of white road paint at a steady speed.³²

I originally read *Mezzanine* to find out how Baker evoked the sensuality of physical actions through recounting details. But this technique also slows down narrative time. What I discovered was the relationship between this stylistic approach and the structure of his novels. The journalist Ben East summarises how *Mezzanine* sustains momentum in the absence of plot:

Eschewing narrative in favour of a virtuosic, minimalist exploration of life's trivialities, the book has Howie marvelling at the engineering of an escalator and worried about the best way to put on socks. With its enjoyably digressive footnotes, this short but hugely inventive novel helped point the way for the audacious styles of writers such as Dave Eggers and David Foster Wallace.³³

During this time I was also referring to *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*³⁴ by David Foster Wallace for his elongated sentences which snag readers in a character's labyrinthine thoughts.

In the first section of *Mark* I wanted to stage my concerns about how to ethically approach writing Mark and to explore my mind as a space in which remembering could take on a narrative. This introductory section gave me permission for the second section where I described the gesture of ink drinking as a sequence of spatial and bodily actions separate from the Mark I knew at school. When I reread this description it prompted a chain of new questions: *What does ink taste of? How did he pick his moment? Did anyone else talk about it afterwards? Did he want everyone to know?* I searched for a way to answer these questions but without any authentic Mark to ask, I needed to imagine Mark one more time. In an earlier editing process I had removed sections of writing which interpreted the gesture. This analysis had created emotional distance from the gesture. I returned to these deleted sentences and reworked them as answers. I wanted an ending and answers were a way of halting the multiplication of Mark.

Writing *Mark* was a process of reflecting upon the ethics of writing a character with a root in my personal history. A tension was set up between two conflicting desires:

32. NICHOLSON BAKER, *Mezzanine* (London: Granta, 2011), 37.

33. BEN EAST, 'The Mezzanine by Nicholson Baker – review', *The Guardian* [website], (24 July 2011), <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/24/the-mezzanine-nicholson-baker-review>>, accessed 31 July 2015, para. 1.

34. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, 2001).

to write in response to my memory of the ink drinking incident and to give this writing the form of a character. I wanted to foreground the guilt I felt about making Mark up so I staged the scene in the Post Office to confront myself with the figment of my imagination. By writing *Mark* I tried to discern the boundary between three characters: the narrator, the writer and the character who is their memory, their subject and their projection. By multiplying Mark I was able to keep writing but each new Mark exposed the core ethical problem of representing a ‘real’ person. Instigating Mark’s instability – as a character, a name for a gesture and a memory – necessitated a narrator, and a writer, who was prepared to explore their faulty ethics and their fascination with a graphic, empowering gesture.

9. Notes

07.08.15

Will the character be multiple or will the character multiply?

The author Italo Calvino advocates multiplicity as one of the qualities of literature worth cherishing in his collection of lecture notes *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*.¹ Having discussed the work of Carlo Emilio Gadda, Robert Musil, Marcel Proust, Raymond Queneau and Georges Perec he concludes:

I have come to the end of this apologia for the novel as a vast net. Someone might object that the more the work tends toward the multiplication of possibilities, the further it departs from that unicum which is the self of the writer, his inner sincerity and the discovery of his own truth. But I would answer: Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable.²

Understanding is an illusion. Is intimacy also an illusion?

Following the publication of *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace was interviewed by the writer and journalist Laura Miller for Salon Magazine.³ She asked him, ‘What do you think is uniquely magical about fiction?’ and he replied:

Well, the first line of attack for that question is that there is this existential loneliness in the real world. I don’t know what you’re thinking or what it’s like inside you and you don’t know what it’s like inside me. In fiction I think we can leap over that wall itself in a certain way. But that’s just the first level, because the idea of mental or emotional intimacy with a character is a delusion or a contrivance that’s set up through art by the writer. There’s another level that a piece of fiction is a conversation. There’s a relationship set up between the reader and the writer that’s very strange and very complicated and hard to talk about. A really great piece of fiction for me may or may not take me away and make me forget that I’m sitting in a chair. There’s real commercial stuff can do that, and a riveting plot can do that, but it doesn’t make me feel less lonely.

There’s a kind of Ah-ha! Somebody at least for a moment feels about something or sees something the way that I do. It doesn’t happen all the time. It’s these brief flashes or flames, but I get that sometimes. I feel unalone – intellectually,

1. ITALO CALVINO, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993).

2. Ibid. 124.

3. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE interviewed by LAURA MILLER, SALON [website], (9 Mar. 1996 06:00 pm GMT), < http://www.salon.com/1996/03/09/wallace_5/>, accessed 8 Aug. 2015.

emotionally, spiritually. I feel human and unalone and that I'm in a deep, significant conversation with another consciousness in fiction and poetry in a way that I don't with other art.⁴

Hunting for the origins of Wallace's unfinished final novel *The Pale King*⁵ the academic Stephen J. Burn argues that Wallace's comments on the unique value of fiction from SALON echo an epilogue written by C.S. Lewis in his monograph *An Experiment in Criticism*. Lewis writes:

Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself. And even when we build disinterested fantasies, they are saturated with, and limited by, our own psychology. To acquiesce in this particularity on the sensuous level – in other words, not to discount perspective – would be lunacy. We should then believe that the railway line really grew narrower as it receded into the distance. But we want to escape the illusions of perspective on higher levels too. We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts as well as our own. One of the things we feel after reading a great work is “I have got out.” Or from another point of view, “I have got in”; pierced the shell of some other monad and discovered what it is like inside..... out of the shell, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness.⁶

For Wallace and Lewis literary experiences are an emollient for loneliness but Lewis wants a plurality of perspectives, wants to enter points of view different from one's own. Wallace wants moments of affinity, acknowledgement of one's feelings and thoughts. Lewis is escaping the confines of his own mind; Wallace is being heard in an asymmetrical conversation.

Jan Verwoert proposes a 'Zone of Sentience' which echoes Lewis and Wallace but replaces 'intimacy' with a continuum of feelings which are not an illusion but a reality represented symbolically:

Reducible to neither of the two but partaking in both, art and writing then dwell on the threshold between the realm of discrete symbolic gestures and the messy web of emotional ties that underlies this realm and connects all living creatures by virtue of the fact that they share life. Codes of representation govern the realm of symbolic gestures. The horizon of experience that, phenomenologically

4. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE interviewed by LAURA MILLER, SALON [website], (9 Mar. 1996 06:00 pm GMT), < http://www.salon.com/1996/03/09/wallace_5/>, accessed 8 Aug. 2015, 5th question.

5. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* (London: Penguin, 2012).

6. STEPHEN J. BURN “A Paradigm for the Life of Consciousness”: Closing Time in ‘The Pale King’, *Studies in the Novel*, 44/4 (Winter 2012), <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23408626>>, accessed 9 Aug. 2015, 379.

speaking, precedes and exceeds this realm, is the horizon of the *zone of sentience*, a substratum of our perception, where, living among them, we sense what others sense and feel what others feel so that all feeling relates to other feeling.⁷

Instead of looking *at* the character (from the perspective of a narrator or writer) make a mutual portrait.

Make a simultaneous, double portrait of Ruth⁸ and I. Regarding each other through the overlaps between our practices? A mutual portrait emerging in the interpersonal space created by observing each other. Make two portraits at once like the art critic James Lord sitting for Alberto Giacometti's painting, Giacometti simultaneously becoming the subject of Lord's textual study.⁹ Ruth and I have the same accent, are from the same place, have the same art education, we both recite from memory as part of our writing and performance praxis.

In *A Piece Danced Alone*,¹⁰ the artist, dancer and choreographer Alexandra Bachzetsis passes a dance solo back and forth between her and a dancer Anne Pajunen. Both wear the same costumes, share the same choreography and, after they don hooded suits concealing their faces and bodies, they become interchangeable with each other. In the introduction their C.V.'s are presented establishing them as unique, different but also processed by the same institutions and education.

Will the character begin with an accident? But not something falling from the sky.¹¹

In *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History*¹² Ross Hamilton examines the 'novel accidents'¹³ central to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. Hamilton argues that in the literature of the

7. JAN VERWOERT, 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: On the Risk of Bearing Witness and the Art of Affective Labour', *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, ed. Vanessa Ohlraun (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 264.

8. RUTH BARKER is a performance artist based in Glasgow with whom I have previously collaborated.

9. JAMES LORD, *A Giacometti Portrait* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980).

10. ALEXANDRA BACHZETSIS, *A Piece Danced Alone* (Commissioned by Glasgow International Festival, presented in collaboration with Chisenhale Gallery, London and the Centre d'Art Contemporain de Brétigny, 2014), performed at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow, 25 & 26 Apr. 2012.

11. TOM MCCARTHY, *The Remainder* (Paris: Metronome, 2005).

12. ROSS HAMILTON, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago: CUP, 2007).

13. ROSS HAMILTON, 'Novel Accidents: Self-determining Accidents in Print Culture', *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago: CUP, 2007), 129–160.

eighteenth century accidents become secularised into events reflecting the traumatic social upheavals of modernisation. The simultaneous explosion of print culture and new journalism influenced how these authors framed contingency in their work as accident. Hamilton notes:

One of the stated functions of the new journalism was to help readers understand human behaviour – their own and that of others. People extended their understanding of their relationships to random events as well as to unexpected or ambiguous actions by comparing a vast range of literary accidents with events in their own lives. They could read and reflect on stories in which characters were hit by the shock of experience. By following the narrative implications of mishaps or coincidences under the guidance of an author, people became more conscious of self-determining acts.¹⁴

Hamilton concludes with Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*:

In the last decades of the century, a flurry of critical and popular attention to Sterne's work propelled novelists toward a more subjective examination of character. His principle of internal consistency allowed greater flexibility in delineating human behaviour because it was premised on a new perception of the variations in the ways people think and feel. The extent to which qualities of mind were conditioned by mental as well as physical accidents became an accepted literary understanding.¹⁵

Figure it out!¹⁶

Mr Phillips and Emmet and the narrator/writer of *Mark* become tangled in their thinking, they are 'scrupulously thoughtful'.¹⁷ Lydia Davis applies this scrupulous thinking to the re-enactment of a troubled relationship in her novel *The End of the Story*.¹⁸ This relationship acts like Nicholson Baker's locked room.¹⁹ Davis tries to figure out the mystery of the relationship beginning many of her paragraphs in uncertainty: 'I did not know exactly what he did [...]';²⁰ 'I don't know if it was on that day [...]';²¹ 'I did

14. ROSS HAMILTON, 'Novel Accidents: Self-determining Accidents in Print Culture', *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago: CUP, 2007), 135.

15. Ibid. 160.

16. see Ch. 8, n. 31.

17. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 203.

18. LYDIA DAVIS, *The End of the Story* (New York: Picador, 2004).

19. see Ch. 8, n. 31.

20. LYDIA DAVIS, *The End of the Story* (New York: Picador, 2004), 70.

21. Ibid. 73.

not know [...]’;²² ‘I did not know where he was [...]’;²³ ‘I did not know if I was [...]’.²⁴ Davis examines the uncertainty, searching for but failing to find clarification in her scrupulously clear prose:

I say at one point that I fell in love with him quite suddenly, and that it happened by candlelight. But this seems too easy, and I also can’t remember just what candlelight I was talking about. There was no candlelight in the café the first evening, and there was no candlelight in my house later that night either, so I evidently don’t mean that I fell in love with him the first night. And yet I do remember that even as soon as the next morning, when I saw him again, I felt a sudden, strong emotion. If I wasn’t in love with him, I don’t know what I was feeling. If I had already fallen in love with him by then, it must have happened sometime between the moment he left me in the early morning and the moment I saw him again, unless it happened the very instant I saw him again.²⁵

The arrangement of the objects in the room keeps moving. If the room is in flux, is it hard to apprehend a discreet arrangement of character? What about arrangements from years ago?

The cyclical form of Arthur Schnitzler’s 1897 play *Hands Around*²⁶ brings ten characters together in ten sexual encounters. Each character is explored in two different conversational couplings: the Girl of the Streets encounters the Soldier, and then the Soldier encounters the Parlour-maid who encounters the Young Man, and then the Young Man encounters the Young Wife, and then the Young Wife encounters the Husband etc. Each character is Janus faced: each character has two partners, two contexts, two ‘characters’ or aspects. The cycle moves through different social classes in order to expose hypocrisy in Austrian society. And because each encounter is sexual, as well as conversational, the characters are built through their elaborate duplicity.

Why limit myself to a double portrait? Why choose a monogamous form? Why not a chain of encounters?

22. LYDIA DAVIS, *The End of the Story* (New York: Picador, 2004), 74.

23. Ibid. 75.

24. Ibid. 75.

25. Ibid. 45.

26. ARTHUR SCHNITZLER, *Hands Around* (New York: Dover, 1995).

(15) **You are of vital importance
to the art community**

You arrive on Valentine's day. A friend of a friend helps **you** move. There is a big openness. Your life is kind of free of a lot of restrictions. **You** are a sweet person, quite honest in a way. **You** blush easily. **You** bite gently at the soft lining of your inner cheek. Sometimes **you look** like **you** are a bit on your own. People introduce **you** to their lives. **You** like just about everybody. There is this sense that there's a lot going on. **You** pretend to be naïve as if **you** don't really know what's going on. **You** don't really know what's going on. **You** go to Mono. **You** go to the GFT. **Look** back to remember the way **you** came. **You** are self-effacing. **You** don't feel an obligation to do certain things in life in the way that some people might.

Somebody makes a suggestion. **You** offer to help because **you** don't have a job and you're **looking** for ways into things, so **you** just hang out a bit painting walls. **You** studied at Goldsmiths. **You** studied at Saint Martins. **You** go to the Hot Club. **You** go to the 13th Note. You're at the Transmission summer party, lying on the bowling lawn with friends, and **you look** incredibly handsome as if you've just sort of appeared from nowhere. You're seen a few times at other art events, **you** have a new haircut, there's something different about **you**.

10. *You are of vital importance to the art community*: Redescribing the Published Study

‘You are of vital importance to the art community’ is an affirmation of belonging. This title speaks from deep within a community, already embedded, and addresses a ‘You’ who is also embedded but perhaps unaware of just how valuable they are. This is reassuring *and* disconcerting. Sometimes in my everyday life I feel like I am part of an art community but sometimes I do not – am I being recruited by this title? As is the case in *Mark*, ‘you’ (the second person personal pronoun) could either be the reader or a generalised everyone/anyone. What is at stake in this shifting target is whether I can see myself as part of the generalised ‘you’ which here forms a community. Not any community but *the* art community. Here the character of You is valued, more than valued, the phrase ‘vital importance’ amplifies the power of recognition with aliveness. Voiced in a camp tone, the presence of You becomes a life or death issue. Susan Sontag articulates this particular form of seriousness in her notes on camp, here is note number 23:

In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve.¹

The title has an emotional nudity which when articulated awkwardly suggests an unguarded outpouring. Within the title one word grates syntactically and graphically, the preposition ‘of’ sticks up dividing the sentence. ‘Of’² suggests that You belongs to the community in a very serious way. If I compare the less analytical embrace: *You are vitally important to the art community* it’s easier to see the work ‘of’ is doing. ‘Of’ lends a proper tone to this belonging but it also camps up the affirmation.

The first sentence describes a new start. Like an anonymous Valentine’s card You arrives helped by an equally anonymous ‘friend of a friend’. Observation and anonymity are opening themes, ‘look’ and ‘looking’ are repeated. The context for this looking is an unfamiliar place, looking *for* and being looked *at* are two sides of being a stranger in town. The character You slowly builds into a shy and slightly nervous explorer without identifying who is doing the exploring or who is doing the building.

The first few sentences are all short and simple and when married with the repetition of ‘you’ a rhythm is set. In Calvino’s *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* he describes

1. SUSAN SONTAG, ‘Notes On: “Camp”’, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 283.

2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘of’, eds. Catherine Soanes, Angus Stevenson (11th edn., Oxford: OUP, 2009).

(15) You are of vital importance
to the art community

You arrive on Valentine's day. A friend of a friend helps you move. There is a big openness. Your life is kind of free of a lot of restrictions. You are a sweet person, quite honest in a way. You blush easily. You bite gently at the soft lining of your inner cheek. Sometimes you look like you are a bit on your own. People introduce you to their lives. You like just about everybody. There is this sense that there's a lot going on. You pretend to be naïve as if you don't really know what's going on. You don't really know what's going on. You go to Mono. You go to the GFT. Look back to remember the way you came. You are self-effacing. You don't feel an obligation to do certain things in life in the way that some people might.

Somebody makes a suggestion. You offer to help because you don't have a job and you're looking for ways into things, so you just hang out a bit painting walls. You studied at Goldsmiths. You studied at Saint Martins. You go to the Hot Club. You go to the 13th Note. You're at the Transmission summer party, lying on the bowling lawn with friends, and you look incredibly handsome as if you've just sort of appeared from nowhere. You're seen a few times at other art events, you have a new haircut, there's something different about you.

the expediency of folk tales. Calvino cites the nineteenth century author Barbey d'Aurevilly for his concise transcription of the tale of Charlemagne's ring.³ Calvino writes, 'The secret of the story lies in its economy: the events, however long they last, become punctiform, connected by rectilinear segments, in a zigzag pattern that suggest incessant motion.'⁴ There is a similar spatial quality to this prose: the clipped sentences jump around plotting points in social and geographical space rather than actions developing along more fluid lines. Calvino extends his ideas on quickness by noting the use of repetition in the tradition of oral narration:

Oral narration leaves out unnecessary details but stresses repetition: for example, when the tale consists of a series of the same obstacles to be overcome by different people. A child's pleasure in listening to stories lies partly in waiting for things he expects to be repeated: situations, phrases, formulas. Just as in poems and songs the rhymes help to create rhythm, so in prose narrative there are events that rhyme. The Charlemagne legend is highly effective narrative because it is a series of events that echo each other as rhymes do in a poem.⁵

Calvino cites Charlemagne's obsessional return to different kinds of love: necrophiliac, homosexual and transgenerational as examples of rhyming events.⁶ There are many returns and repetitions in the first two pages which give *You are of vital importance to the art community* the momentum of an extended rhyme. Calvino concludes, 'The very first characteristic of a folktale is economy of expression. The most outlandish adventures are recounted with an eye fixed on the bare essentials.'⁷ Like *Emmet*, there is a pared back, truncated quality to this prose which accelerates events, jumping forward through time, evoking the velocity and disorientation of arriving in a new place. The first page neatly begins and ends with 'you'. This particular You begins as a stranger but becomes different and special, seen against a green lawn at a summer party You is handsome and something of an apparition.

The repetition of the phrase, 'You go to [...]', emphasises place names. The generalised 'go to' gives the impression of a character on a map, marking a time and place with their presence. The anonymity of the character foregrounds the personality of places which accumulate into a social topology. For the character You places are to be done and ticked off. Places slowly mesh together into a social circuit. Friends, mates and laughter appear on the second page and You takes on a new self-reflective state leading to the question of happiness. Place names are invested with personal

3. See Appendix C.

4. ITALO CALVINO, 'Quickness', *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 34–35.

5. Ibid. 35.

6. Ibid. 34.

7. Ibid. 37.

You occasionally retreat. You can be very buttoned-up. You're very quiet for a long period of time and then you suddenly come out with something quite well observed or out there. It's hard to explain why you're laughing. There are moments when you are definitely enjoying yourself. You laugh because you're surprised you're laughing. You go for a drink at Universal, afterwards you walk along Sauchiehall Street and change the names of all the shops to something funny. You go to the Doublet. You're at the Modern Institute. The phone rings, you have a cup of tea with a mate. You go to Asia Style for a friend's birthday. After watching *Metropolis*, *Pierrot le Fou* and *Sabotage*, your friends fall asleep in your room. Your mockney accent makes your friends laugh. You are a frequent user of the Megabus, often overnight.

You go to EMBASSY. You go to Collective. You go to Generator. You're settled. You put a framed work into the members' show at Transmission. The image is considered and appropriated but not in the usual way. You are uncommunicative in a very interesting way. You have the persistence that is necessary. You are one to keep an eye on. Where does the desire to call yourself an artist come from? Your shirt is nice, or your bag's really nice, your glasses are really nice, just silly things like that. It's fair to say you're envied.

You are in the basement of Nice'N'Sleazy's, some bands are playing. What is dance? What is music? Music is such a primordial, beautiful, human thing. You play the record again and again. It's like a flood,

meanings, each name becomes the object of a playful cathexis,⁸ ‘You go for a drink at Universal, afterwards you walk along Sauchiehall Street and change the names of all the shops to something funny.’

As *You* becomes idiosyncratic rather than merely special they begin to wonder what being an artist or a musician means. Their context: art schools, an art scene, galleries and exhibitions expand to include music. The influence of art on music, and vice versa, combine with accumulating place names to identify the city as Glasgow. A volley of questions: ‘Where does the desire to call yourself an artist come from?’, ‘What is dance? What is music?’ suggest a self-reflective mood. As is the case in *Mark* the questions are also potentially directed out at me. From these questions blossoms a new emotional tone of voice. The anonymity ‘you’ creates is suddenly coloured by *You*’s first value judgment, ‘Music is such a primordial, beautiful, human thing.’ The striking combination of ‘primordial’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘human’ suddenly appear within the shifting subjectivity of this second person narrative. This sentence could be described as what James Wood terms ‘free indirect style’. Wood writes:

Thanks to free indirect style, we see things through the character’s eyes and language, too. We inhabit omniscience and partiality at once. A gap opens between author and character, and the bridge – which is free indirect style itself – between them simultaneously closes that gap and draws attention to its distance.

This is another definition of dramatic irony: to see through a character’s eyes while being encouraged to see more than the character can see (an unreliability identical to the unreliable first-person narrator’s).⁹

In *You are of vital importance to the art community* the narrator describes the change in the character’s complexion, how they bite their cheek, whether they look lonely from across a room, and their educational history. Their perspective on *You* is intimate, social and biographical. The narration is in the second person and uses free indirect style but the narrator also adopts an omniscient perspective. David Foster Wallace’s short piece *Forever Overhead*¹⁰ takes a similar approach using the compression and acceleration of time. The piece is set at a swimming pool where the character is celebrating his 13th birthday:

Your family likes you. You are bright and quiet, respectful to elders – though you are not without spine. You are largely good. You look out for your little sister. You are her ally. You were six when she was zero and you had the mumps when they brought her home in a very soft yellow blanket; you kissed her hello on her feet

8. CHARLES RYCROFT, *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. ‘cathexis’ (2nd edn., London: Penguin, 1995), 19.

9. JAMES WOOD, *How Fiction Works* (London: Vintage, 2009), 11.

10. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, ‘Forever Overhead’, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, London, 2001).

You occasionally retreat. You can be very buttoned-up. You're very quiet for a long period of time and then you suddenly come out with something quite well observed or out there. It's hard to explain why you're laughing. There are moments when you are definitely enjoying yourself. You laugh because you're surprised you're laughing. You go for a drink at Universal, afterwards you walk along Sauchiehall Street and change the names of all the shops to something funny. You go to the Doublet. You're at the Modern Institute. The phone rings, you have a cup of tea with a mate. You go to Asia Style for a friend's birthday. After watching *Metropolis*, *Pierrot le Fou* and *Sabotage*, your friends fall asleep in your room. Your mockney accent makes your friends laugh. You are a frequent user of the Megabus, often overnight.

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You are in the basement of Nice'N'Sleazy's, some bands are playing. What is dance? What is music? Music is such a primordial, beautiful, human thing. You play the record again and again. It's like a flood,

out of concern that she not catch your mumps. Your parents say that this augured well. That it set the tone. They now feel they were right. In all things they are proud of you, satisfied, and they have retreated to the warm distance from which pride and satisfaction travel.¹¹

Forever Overhead conjures an overview then drills into the personal. Distance from the character is created by the pronoun 'you' but the particularity of the words 'ally' and 'zero' close the emotional distance through free indirect style.

In *You are of vital importance to the art community* this oscillation between distance and proximity happens between sentences. Even though full stops end sentences the en-dash, as a means of indicating a pronounced change in direction, haunts the prose. Some of the fissures between the sentences have the additional quality of a time lag as well as a change in direction. Consider the movement between these sentences, 'You're very quiet for a long period of time and then you suddenly come out with something quite well observed or out there. It's hard to explain why you're laughing.' There is also a pervasive vagueness that veils transitions and skirts specifics. The most acute example is on the first page, 'Somebody makes a suggestion. You offer to help because you don't have a job and you're looking for ways into things, so you just hang out a bit painting walls.' The words 'somebody' and 'things' give this character a porous quality. You's agency comes from outside, from 'somebody', and what You wants to get into are the non-specific 'things'. Details are omitted giving You an enigmatic surface, 'The image is considered and appropriated but not in the usual way. You are uncommunicative in a very interesting way.'

You's subjectivity emerges but at the same time You retains plurality through the implied direct address. The second person personal pronoun, both singular and plural, also has the potential to tip into the informal version of the third person 'one'. Over the course of the narrative the grammatical dynamism of 'you', combined with the present tense, does something peculiar to the reading experience. It is possible to: project yourself into the character, to generalise the character into an 'anybody' and to be confronted by a direct address. The character disperses, dwelling in different places, animated by my changing relationship to 'You'. You is sustained as both a singular and 'plural protagonist',¹² like Wittig's collective character 'elles'.¹³

On the first page the proximity to and distance from the character is achieved by

11. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, 'Forever Overhead', *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, London, 2001), 6.

12. LEWIS TURCO, *The Book of Literary Terms* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 47.

13. MONIQUE WITTIG, *Les Guérillères*, trans, David Le Vay [Ubu ebook edn.] (n.p. Ubu, 2007), <http://busyreadywhat.org/Authors/Wittig,%20Monique/wittig_guerilleres.pdf>, accessed 10 May 2014.

or a spill, much stranger than a lot of things you have heard round here. There's an urge to discover more and more and join the dots between different experiments and genres and time periods. You could open a record shop. At a friend's house you play with an old tape recorder; the results are very nice. Maybe you are more of a musician than an artist. When you try to speak about your practice you become very vague. You play a concert at the Street Level in spring. There is a DI box on the stage and a mixer thing. You move tiny coloured shapes around on a table, you are so provocatively banal, you do so little and yet it fills up the whole space. By taking your time you bring a slowness and grace to your movements. A paradox you have carried is released.

He comes up to you to tell you that your performance really meant a lot to him. You have some good ideas and a pop sensibility. You have that kind of John Cage heritage. You have a signed postcard by Jacques Derrida. You become a kind of character. You do this to yourself. You're not interested in doing things that are not going to be great. The idea of doing something incredible haunts you. You are torn between wanting to be highly visible and having this lack of confidence in yourself and your work. She really liked your performance with the little coloured shapes. Someone dedicates a song to you. You're happy. You're lazy. You are part of the furniture of Glasgow. You make Glasgow interesting. You want to make Glasgow your home. You get a job translating.

the narrator zooming in and out on You the passive stranger in town. The second page puts an emphasis on the character's inverted agency opening with 'You occasionally retreat': You now has a depth to retreat into. You communicates by withholding – I am reminded of Emmet's reluctance to verbalise his feelings and thoughts but here the withdrawal belies an expansion of character sponsored by friends on a page full of laughter. The third page traces the emergence of a nascent practice tentatively shared with the community referred to in the title. You's concert is described in complimentary, lyrical terms, 'You move tiny coloured shapes around on a table, you are so provocatively banal, you do so little and yet it fill up the whole space. By taking your time you bring a slowness and grace to your movements. A paradox you have carried in released.'

The prose softens into a less staccato rhythm, the sentences flow together developing observations rather than breaking off. You's passion for art and music takes the form of performance: a direct communication to which the community responds. Up until this midway point the gender of the character is unspecified and the people who make up their world are generic 'friends'. The performance ignites a conversation between You and their community. 'He' and 'She' approach You and offer their feedback which is touching, sincere and informed. He and She are gendered and voiced with nuance, they engage and value the performance which affirms You as '[...] part of the furniture of Glasgow. You make Glasgow interesting.' You's relationship to the city is authenticated by members of an audience and with this affirmation comes an increased vulnerability.

You wants to build on their 'John Cage heritage', to be visible but they 'lack confidence'. Caught between ambition and self-doubt they manufacture a character, 'You become a kind of character. You do this to yourself.' You reflects back on the distance they have covered and is embraced by the city, Glasgow is the place they call home but this realisation is underscored by the final sentence, 'You get a job translating.' They are multi-lingual or bi-lingual and possibly exist across cultures and nationalities. You is narrowing to a bi-lingual artist/musician working in Glasgow.

You thrives, participating in the social etiquette of suits and weddings and romance. And it is through the performance of these gendered rituals that the character of You deepens. Wearing a 'suit' and pursuing a 'girl' suggests male gendered gestures. This paragraph, one of the most compressed, lends the romantic interlude an intense quality. The sentences jump around, leaping distance in much the same way boundaries are crossed in the pursuit of love, 'She lets you talk her into reading a John Cage book. Inside the wrapping paper is a bottle of Chambord. It's not life-shaking love but you are pretty sure about her. You make a wish.' The relationship accelerates then burns out within the paragraph. Despite the speed a feeling of disappointment is felt as an

You wear a suit to your friend's wedding. You pursue a girl. You understand that desire is real but, being desire, it is also just an impulse. She lets you talk her into reading a John Cage book. Inside the wrapping paper is a bottle of Chambord. It's not life-shaking love but you are pretty sure about her. You make a wish. You don't know what you want so you pull back from wanting. You realise it's over and you want for it not to be over. You have to make lots of fake blood, that is actually your day job. You're bored.

You begin to hold back a bit, as if there are more layers to you now. Are there psychological things going on in the background that might be sort of restricting your life in certain ways? You can't really say for sure. You perform at the CCA. You play a concert at a friend's house. You go to the Variety. You sing karaoke. You do a show at Intermedia. You pick up a record in Mono and your life is just moving along nicely and you feel like an integrated part of what's going on here. Your friends sing Happy Birthday to you. A wave of affection makes you put down your glass and really listen to the conversation as it moves around the table; somebody notices you're quiet tonight.

Your visa is revoked. The powers that be tell you to get out. The whole legal side of things takes up time. You have to cope with the threat that you might not be able to stay. People want to help you because it's a horrible situation. They want you to fight it. People start talking about why you are so

abrupt shift with the force of a non sequitur, 'You realise it's over and you want for it not to be over. You have to make fake blood, that is actually your day job.' This jolt delivers a blunt and raw sense of what the separation feels like and 'actually' is there in the following sentence to acknowledge an inescapable and mundane sadness. The paragraph ends with 'You're bored', previously engaging endeavours are drained of meaning.

A melancholic tone sends You inwards, 'You begin to hold back a bit, as if there are more layers to you now.' There are more layers, more words on the page, enough to constitute a character. Lisa Robertson describes melancholia as 'a big contemplative utopia' where transformations take place. She writes, 'Transformations may include decay, multiplication, reversal, inflation or minification, fragmentation or annexation, plus all the Ovidian modalities.'¹⁴ Having enough volume to retreat into, having a protective front, being hurt gives You a psychological dimension and an interior life of the mind. The next question uses the word 'psychological' to suggest unconscious levels, occluded and powerful, perhaps limiting because they are hidden. The first three sentences of this paragraph are also among the slowest, almost reaching a standstill with the uncertainty of 'You can't really say for sure.' A wistful, philosophical tone drifts into a list of six activities, the longest list so far. The paragraph ends with a withdrawn silence observed by a friend. This paragraph is a harbinger of the end. Birthdays mark time and the final paragraph connects together the bi-lingual You with an expired visa.

Various kinds of silence are used to describe distance. There is the silence of the stranger in a city, the silence of a shy personality, the silence of self-consciousness, of self-reflection and the silence of loss and sadness. Once You accretes into a bi-lingual artist/musician whose visa is revoked these silences are also the expressions of an outsider: the hesitation in a second language or not getting a new culture. The earlier sentence 'There's something different about you' takes on a different tone once deportation is threatened. The final paragraph abruptly reasserts the anonymity of You who is threatened by 'the powers that be'. Against this institutional bureaucracy the community (which constituted the character) call upon their own institution, the Arts Council, to save You.

The pressure on You increases until someone raises their voice over the music and over the din of the community. Again, I feel the shift from impersonal to intimate as a zoom into close-up. The following sentence is particularly heartfelt and works as a sly critique of the word 'friend' which is repeated 13 times throughout the narrative,

14. LISA ROBERTSON, '7.5 Minute Talk for Eva Hesse', *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, The Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias* (Toronto: BookThug, 2012), 51.

important to Glasgow. You are of vital importance to the art community. They envisage probably having to apply for an Arts Council grant to keep you. You are given two weeks to leave the country. Why don't you fight it? You think things will be resolved and then you are told you have to be gone within the week. Transmission ask you to give a talk but you're leaving. You're being deported. You have a leaving do. He raises his voice above the music and says that in the whole time he's lived here he actually counts you in a bundle of people that are his real friends. You say goodbye at the corner of Otago Street and Great Western Road. You don't really want to do a big goodbye thing either. There is this aspect of voidness. There are a couple of tears. A text message wishes you a good flight.

‘He raises his voice above the music and says that in the whole time he’s lived here he actually counts you in a bundle of people that are his real friends.’ This affirmation, unlike the others, comes from someone else who has ‘lived’, as opposed to being raised, in the city making the emotional stakes of the deportation evident. Woven between all the gigs, the performances, the pubs and clubs are relationships felt as ‘real’. The topography of the city and the velocity of the community is interrupted by tears. You departs accompanied by one of the most reductive forms of communication, a text message. ‘There are a couple of tears’, the tears are a couple, the *couple* traditionally having a special bond. And ‘there are’ dissolves ownership; do the tears belong to You or their ‘real friend’ or both? This sentence evokes a tactful intimacy.

I want to pause on the sentence ‘There is this aspect of voidness’ and examine its relationship to a sentence in the first paragraph ‘There is a big openness.’ Both are positioned as the third sentence in from the extremities of the piece: one from the start and the other from the end. The sentences are free from ‘you’, they mirror each other and they collapse the space between the narrator, You (the character) and me (the reader). I am not sure who is speaking or who is being addressed. These two sentences expand beyond You and the narrator opening outward. They are like views out, perspectives onto openness or voidness reaching beyond the confines of the narrative. And the difference between the two words is telling. Void means null and void, not valid, as well as empty or vacant and has the connotations of useless or lacking.¹⁵ ‘Voidness’ is also a neologism and an exaggeration linking backward to the beginning rhyming with ‘openness’. What is the different between ‘openness’ and ‘voidness’? In this context, these sentences describe free floating feelings, cut adrift from a particular figure or place. ‘Openness’ is a feeling of freedom articulated as the absence of barriers, unfolded, accessible¹⁶ and ‘voidness’ is a feeling of emptiness within boundaries. These two words draw me back to ‘nothing’ and the function it has in *Emmet* and *Mark*. Although ‘nothing’ is absent here, You – like Emmet and Mark – moves along a continuum which has at one end the concept of absence.

Whether I feel an openness or voidness depends on whether You is arriving or leaving, whether You is free or bound, whether You is inchoate or has cohered. At the end what is hollowed out of You through deportation *is* community, community constitutes their character. You cannot return to the beginning, to ‘openness’, once deportation is underway because the artist/musician is fabricated from the community and possesses a subjectivity rendered through it. In Adam Phillip’s essay *On Not Getting*

15. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘void’, eds. Catherine Soanes, Angus Stevenson (11th edn., Oxford: OUP, 2009).

16. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘open’, eds. Catherine Soanes, Angus Stevenson (11th edn., Oxford: OUP, 2009).

It, he explores how the condition of the outsider is constructed in opposition to the social coercion generated by groups. He writes:

Groups of people tend to be defined, or to define themselves, by the things they all get. Outsiders don't get it, and if or when they do, it is a shock to the system (as all immigrants know). Such moments of recognition, when connections are suddenly sprung – when something is said that is something in common – always promise an abundance; they seem to push on an open door.¹⁷

Reading *You are of vital importance to the art community* is a dynamic experience. Rhythm, rhyme, repetition and cyclical returns create momentum. Spatial leaps, time jumps, narrative gaps and shifts in perspective make space for reflection. Amongst the roaming 'you' there is enough intimacy and idiosyncrasy to make You feel present and close. You is an outsider who is bound to a community. You becomes notable, promising and sponsors feelings of affinity. You's arrival and departure frames an accretion of character on the page via an inventory of encounters with a community. There are lots of thinly veiled criticisms of this community and the abrupt ending is in a sense a judgement of the community. What remains after You has been deported is spent energy. The 'promise of abundance' Phillips describes is interrupted, momentum halts and You is dispersed.

17. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'On Not Getting It', *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 46.

11. *You are of vital importance to the art community*: Redescribing the Writing Process

You are of vital importance to the art community occupied a significant amount of space on the timeline of my practice. The study lent part of its title to the book *You are of vital importance* where I found many of its themes and concerns repeated. Writing *You are of vital importance to the art community* for print in *You are of vital importance* consolidated a number of long-term processes into words on a page. I changed my perspective on the raw materials for this study over time, processing them physically and psychologically using numerous forms, none of which I would consider final. *You are of vital importance to the art community* is the consequence of increasing my distance from a person named T in order to transform them into the character named You.

In 2006 a person called T¹ moved to Glasgow from London. They quickly became involved with a network of people in the city who were making art and music. T made a lot of friends, exhibited artwork and performed experimental music at a number of venues in the city. A year later their visa expired. Due to a number of bureaucratic issues s/he was unable to stay in the United Kingdom and was deported to their country of origin. Despite us both living and practicing in Glasgow, T and I never met.

In 2009 I separated from my partner. I met a man called Callum², we started dating and he invited me to spend the night with him at his flat. The next day I asked to borrow a clean T-shirt. He offered me a black one or a white one with a red geometric design. I chose the white one and commented on how nice the design was. Callum said the T-shirt had previously belonged to his friend T who had great taste in clothes. As Callum talked about T I noticed how much he missed his friend. He spoke with fondness but felt aggrieved because T had cut off all contact with him after his deportation: no email, no Facebook, no phone calls. Callum made attempts to contact T but his overtures were ignored. Even T's Facebook page was taken down. Because of my separation I was attuned to the quality of loss experienced from contact severed in one direction. Unlike a mutual parting, or the absolute disempowerment of bereavement, one-way separations have a uniquely painful asymmetry.

I asked if I could interview Callum about T and our dialogue revealed T had severed contact with everyone in Glasgow, not only Callum. Before T's deportation, Callum had acquired some of T's possessions at an auction held by T to dispose of all the things accumulated during their stay in the UK. Callum rented T's old room which was filled

1. T is the initial of this person's Christian name. I am using an initial because I want to describe this person without making reference to their gender or ethnicity.

2. I have chosen the name 'Callum' to replace this person's Christian name. I want to insinuate Callum as Scottish, white and male: a character possessing these advantages.



PLATE 4. SOPHIE CALLE, 'Prenez soin de vous/Take Care of Yourself', *Talking to Strangers* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 15 Oct. 2009–27 Jan. 2010).

with items unsold at the auction. I asked Callum for a list of the people who attended the auction, most were T's friends. I contacted the 13 people and began the process of interviewing them individually. During the interviews, I took photographs of all the possessions they had purchased at the auction.³ The interviews were structured around a recurring sequence of questions: Do you remember the first time you saw T? What was T like? Do you own anything that belonged to T? Are you still in contact with T? Do you miss T? I completed the interviews and began transcribing the audio recordings.⁴

The decision to interview Callum about his loss was in part a response to two artworks *Prenez soin de vous* (*Take care of yourself*)⁵ and *The Address Book*⁶ by the artist Sophie Calle.⁷ I discovered these works at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in *Talking to Strangers*⁸ a survey exhibition of Calle. Here Calle describes the process of making *The Address Book*:

In June 1983, I found an address book. I photocopied the contents then sent it back anonymously to its owner, whose address was written on the endpaper. Since Liberation had asked me to do an instalment piece for publication in the newspaper that same summer, I decided to contact some of the people whose names appeared in the book and ask them to tell me about the owner. Through them, I would get to know this man. I would try to find out who he was without ever meeting him and produce a portrait of him, over an uncertain period of time, which would depend on the willingness of his friends to talk and the turn taken by events.⁹

In *Prenez soin de vous* (see PLATE 4) Sophie Calle asks 107 women to respond to an email sent by her lover ending their relationship. The 107 responses come from a wide variety of participants with varying professions and skills including: a psychiatrist, a judge, a fortune teller, a journalist, an actress and a proofreader (see PLATE 5). Each processes the email in their own unique way: the proofreader corrects the email and the academic subjects the text to reader-response theory. These people constitute a community of witnesses who re-enact, render and extrapolate Calle's pain on reading

3. See Appendix D.

4. See Appendix E.

5. SOPHIE CALLE, *Prenez soin de vous*, 2007. 106 elements: 7 films + 33 films and prints + 57 prints and texts + 6 wide paper texts + 5 small films and prints, variable dimensions. 52nd Venice Biennale.

6. SOPHIE CALLE, *The Address Book* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998).

7. SOPHIE CALLE, 'Prenez soin de vous/Take Care of Yourself', *Talking to Strangers* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 15 Oct. 2009–27 Jan. 2010).

8. SOPHIE CALLE, *Talking to Strangers* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 15 Oct. 2009–27 Jan. 2010).

9. SOPHIE CALLE, 'The Address Book', *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me?* (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 97.

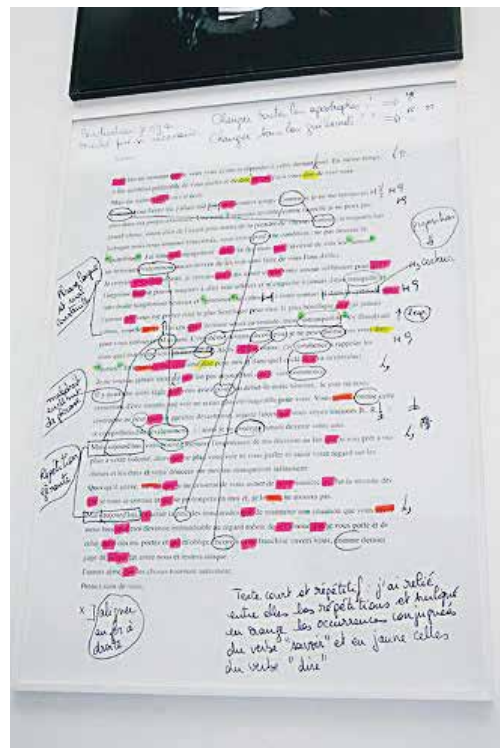


PLATE 5. The proofreader's annotations from SOPHIE CALLE, 'Prenez soin de vous/Take Care of Yourself', *Talking to Strangers* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 15 Oct. 2009–27 Jan. 2010).

the email. The cultural critic Shirley Jordan describes *Prenez soin de vous* as an exorcism of pain via destruction:

The acting-out of the letter through various scenarios is even more effective than its analysis in puncturing the sender's presumptions. Further, not only is the text of the letter critiqued ad infinitum, but the letter itself as physical entity becomes a theatrical prop and is literally crushed. No longer the magnetic centre of the still composition and the luminous guarantor of its tension, it becomes instead subject to a range of destructive practices.¹⁰

Miranda Richardson's performance culminates in an exaggerated shredding while she hums a tune to camera. British rifle shooter Sandy Morin uses the letter for target practice. Brenda the parrot, whose supremely comic performance provides the last word in the (necessarily sequence-driven) book form of *Prenez soin de vous*, shreds the screwed-up letter in her beak and performs a magnificent delayed reaction of indignation, puffing out her feathers and raising her crest. The letter has literally been 'done to death', each performance providing a *mise en abyme* of the larger performative project to which it contributes.¹¹

The asymmetry of the email disempowered Calle, the withdrawal of contact spurred an aggressive response multiplied by 107. *Prenez soin de vous* is an aggressive over interpretation, a way of denying separation by sustaining anger in someone's absence through the annihilation of a 'Dear John' email. Here the art critic and journalist Jonathan Jones describes her rendering, and rendition of, emotion:

The emotional roar at the centre of it – her rage and bewilderment at the man's cruel email – becomes louder and deeper with each new variant on the text. You could almost call it conceptual art's answer to Bach's Goldberg Variations. With each rewrite, the pain is increasingly real and hard to bear.¹²

Similar unresolved emotions surrounded T. By the end of 2010 I had transcribed the 13 interviews and printed photographs of all T's auctioned possessions. Amongst the possessions I found two of Sophie Calle's books: *Fantômes*¹³ and *Les panoplies*.¹⁴ I took this as a signal to keep going (see PLATE 6). I was awarded a residency at Cove Park. I began the residency and sat down to write. I wanted to write an immersive, novelistic artwork with the abbreviated character of T. I had in mind Paul Auster's

10. SHIRLEY JORDAN, 'Performance in Sophie Calle's *Prenez soin de vous*', *French Cultural Studies*, 24(3) (2013), SAGE, <DOI 10.1177/0957155813489092>, accessed 2 Oct. 2015, 258.

11. Ibid.

12. JONATHAN JONES, 'Sophie Calle: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London', *The Guardian*, (published online 9 Oct. 2009), <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/oct/19/sophie-calle-review>>, accessed 13 Oct. 2015, 3rd para.

13. SOPHIE CALLE, *Fantômes* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2000).

14. SOPHIE CALLE, *Les panoplies* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998).



PLATE 6. Two books by the artist Sophie Calle previously belonging to T. Photographed in 2010. Photograph and books now held in the T archive.

nascent character Mr Blank who is held on the threshold of becoming.¹⁵ I was aiming at something similar to Calle's Whitechapel configuration of *Prenez soin de vous*. Jonathan Jones articulates the literary atmosphere of the work:

Walking through this exhibition is like reading a brilliant and innovative contemporary novel. I am not using the simile of literary fiction lightly. Calle makes art you must read. Even the big photographs in the most spectacular installation, *Take Care of Yourself*, are only pointers to the words that constitute the work's heart.¹⁶

In an review, framed as a letter to Calle, the artist and writer Susan Thomson makes more connections between Calle's obsession with the email, literary history and writing as a process. Thomson writes:

It's such a French show, Sophie, reminiscent of a whole body of French literature, recalling all those epistolary novels like *Les Liaisons dangereuses* through to the new novel, the obsessional doomed love of Marguerite Duras. In your intertextual analysis of the e-mail, all the quotes you find are from French literature, all from different periods. When in one video a rifle-shooter shoots holes in the letter and it is later framed in a light box, it is the very epitome of the new novel, blanks in the text and the assumption that this is where truth and light abide. It is reminiscent of Oulipo too and its language games, Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style*, in which he tells the same story 99 times, each in a different style.¹⁷

The residency at Cove Park began but the content of the transcribed interviews intimidated me. The interviews were on a page but the phrases were difficult to adapt or transform. I tried rewriting the transcripts but I struggled to reimagine them, they remained firmly attached to their speakers. I tried reconfiguring the material but I felt I was spoiling it. The people I interviewed were crisp in my memory, their tone of voice was present and I felt I had nothing to add, my interventions felt like intrusions. The quality and quantity of raw material was overwhelming. I felt inhibited by the complexity of it all so I put the material aside.

I did not return to the T material until 2012 when the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow contacted me to participate in an exhibition *What We Have Done, What We Are About To Do*.¹⁸ The exhibition was to be split across two galleries: one screening

15. PAUL AUSTER, *Travels in the Scriptorium* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

16. JONATHAN JONES, 'Sophie Calle: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London', *The Guardian*, (published online 9 Oct. 2009) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/oct/19/sophie-calle-review>>, accessed 13 Oct. 2015, 1st para.

17. SUSAN THOMSON, 'Sophie Calle: Prenez soin de vous, French Pavilion Venice', *Circa Art Magazine* No. 122 (Winter, 2007), JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25564864>>, accessed 5 Oct. 2015, 65.

18. *What We Have Done, What We Are About To Do*, curated by Francis McKee, Oliver Pitt, Rebecca Wilcox (Glasgow: Centre for Contemporary Arts, 13 Aug.–15 Sept. 2012).

would express an individual personality, is Maureen's. Although it is undeniably friendly and cheerful, the friendliness and cheerfulness seem somewhat rote: "How are you feeling? I miss you very much. I hope that you will be back in school soon. I like school very much. I had a very nice time in the snow." Her handwriting is round and slants consistently to the right with one notable exception: the word *I*, which is vertical. It may not be going too far to suggest that these markedly contrasting *I*'s express a sublimated rebelliousness, a suppressed desire to be less conformist and obedient than she evidently is.

Another fairly bland letter, in a small, round script, is Mary's, although she is slightly more emphatic than Maureen—"We all miss you very much"—and adds one specific: "I have had lots of fun playing with my sled in the snow."

The content can be generally summarized as falling under the following headings, within the two more general categories of expressions of sympathy and "news":

Formulaic Expressions of Sympathy

come back soon/wish you were here
 (17 occurrences in 27 letters)
 how are you/hope you are feeling better (16)
 miss you (9)
 experience in hospital/food (4)
 empathy: I know how it feels (2)

News

playing in snow (9)
 Christmas/Christmas presents (7)
 school/schoolwork (4)
 eating/food (4)
 weather (3)
 shopping with parent (2)

PLATE 7. LYDIA DAVIS, 'We Miss You: A Study of Get-Well Letters from a Class of Fourth-Graders', *Varieties of Disturbance: Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 43.

material from the Centre for Contemporary Arts archive, the other exhibiting artworks commissioned by the artists Oliver Pitt and Rebecca Wilcox responding to the notion of archives. I wondered, did my interviews and photographs constitute an archive or a collection? Did I have an archive dedicated to one person or more specifically the absence of a person?

I reviewed the T interview transcripts. My sensitivity to the material had decreased. I reread them with the new context of archiving. I returned to the archival forms of Calle's *Prenez soin de vous*. I noticed that the writer and translator Lydia Davis had used a comparable process of analysis and categorisation to deconstruct a collection of get-well letters written by a class of school children to their absent friend Stephen. In *We Miss You: A Study of Get-Well Letters from a Class of Fourth-Graders*¹⁹ Davis analyses 27 letters for their appearance, length, coherence, sentence structure and content. She separates them into 16 categories under two headings: 'Formulaic Expressions of Sympathy' and 'News' (see PLATE 7).²⁰ I tried to impose my own idiosyncratic categories onto the transcripts.

Certain themes were repeated in the interviews so I cut up the transcripts and gathered together sentences into the categories: volunteering at artist led galleries, the crossovers between music and art, anecdotes about previews of exhibitions, memories of performances, memories of nights out in Glasgow. A basic narrative of T's time in Glasgow appeared across 13 interviews: arriving, settling in, making art and music, falling in love, falling out of love and then deportation. The interviews focused on how a community embraces someone through a network of friendships and a sequence of social events. But the enigma of T, including her/his withdrawal of communication, was also very prominent.

I highlighted and annotated the fragments, gathering themes into piles. I arranged the quotations along a chronological timeline stretching from T's arrival to deportation. The interviews were saturated with names of places in Glasgow, I had a piles of artist led spaces, clubs and small music venues in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. I produced a list of all the proper nouns which traced T's activity across the city.

The quantity of observations about T increased as s/he became more involved in the Glasgow art scene, settled down and made friends. There were a myriad of comments and observations at the mid-point of her/his year in Glasgow (the moment of her/his greatest involvement with music, art and community). Inversely, there were only one or two comments about T's arrival and departure from the city. When laid out,

19. LYDIA DAVIS, 'We Miss You: A Study of Get-Well Letters from a Class of Fourth-Graders', *Varieties of Disturbance: Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 34–57.

20. Ibid. 43–44.



PLATE 8. SARAH TRIPP, *You are of vital importance to the art community*. Inkjet print with collage. 150 x 60 cm. *What We Have Done, What We Are About To Do*, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 13 Aug.–15 Sept. 2012.

the cut up fragments from the interviews formed a flat, horizontal, diamond shape moving from left to right along a timeline stretching from 2006 to 2007. At the central point in the year T was most active creatively and socially, participating in a festival. This performance was recounted by several people, defining T at the widest point in the diamond.

Callum had given me props used by T in the performance. The props were colourful, cardboard diamonds. The movement of these diamonds was described in the interviews, 'When I saw [T's] performance in the Street Level it was weird and so provocatively banal, that I thought this is interesting because [T] was doing so little and yet it filled up the space. It had conviction and was interesting.'²¹ I connected the horizontal diamond of piled up cut out photocopies with the diamonds used by T in the performance. I transferred all the cut up fragments into the graphic design software Illustrator.²² In the process of typing in the transcript fragments from the cut up photocopies I unified the quotations by rewriting them in the present tense and I wanted the gender of the work to be open so I switched the pronouns to 'you'. These two interventions allowed the fragments to make a more direct address to an audience.

In Illustrator I arranged the fragments into a more graphic diamond shape. I applied colour to indicate their themed categories then printed out the file.²³ The framed print looked like a diagram of a community, a polyphonic narrative and an illustrative timeline. I exhibited the print in *What We Have Done, What We Are About To Do* with a framed collage made from the diamonds T used in the performance (see PLATE 8).

During the exhibition I began to consider this arrangement of transcript fragments as the first step towards the novelistic installation I initially wanted to make on the Cove Park residency. Viewing the print in the exhibition I felt the absence of T through the hollowness of the pronoun 'you'. Now the material had the coherent, graphic form of a print, I looked *at*, rather than read, the words. I noticed visitors to the exhibition also had a glancing engagement with the print, people grazed the scattered fragments unsure of what direction to read in. I felt like the emotionally coherent narrative of T's time in Glasgow had been fragmented by the graphic diamond shape and intimacy of the transcribed voices was lost in the public gallery space.

I wanted to retrieve the intimacy and immersion of reading the transcripts, emphasise the presence *and* absence of T and reinstate the linear experience of T's year in Glasgow. While working with the artist led writing group in Glasgow called Brown Study the artist Corin Sworn introduced me the Oulipian literary technique of

21. See Appendix E.

22. Illustrator is software developed by Adobe Systems to facilitate the construction and composition of vector graphics.

23. See Appendix F.

‘larding’. Larding is when supplementary sentences are added in between sentences from an existing text.²⁴ I wanted to extend the fragments from the graphic print into a character study using larding. In preparation for inserting new sentences I flowed the fragments into a linear prose form in order to discover what needed adding to the T narrative. I planned to fill in the missing details with fictional writing: to fictionalise T into You.

The fragments still contained a genuine affection emanating from a plurality of voices. The affection was balanced against a sadness and frustration with T’s silence. Bringing the fragments into prose form happened quickly over the course of a few days. I then began a process of removing the inconsistencies between the different accounts of T’s time in Glasgow. I cleaned up any remaining slippages in tense and added in transcript fragments which were too long to be accommodated by the exhibition print. I did not try to iron out the jumps and bumps in vocabulary or style as the voices switched, this was the work I intended to do next.

Once the fragments moved into a prose form a tension became evident. The abrupt arrival and departure of T was more noticeable because the linearity of prose brought the fragments back into close proximity. The fragments became adjacent sentences but in a dislocated syntax. In T’s absence, in the wake of an enforced non-communication the interviewees found themselves at liberty to speak and able to express their feelings for and against T. Instead of responding with disappointment or outright anger after their emails were ignored they released an unguarded appreciation, affection and sadness. The prose was not a portrait of T but a portrait of the people who surrounded her/him: T’s peers and community. The narrative was becoming a distillation of feelings about an absent person. Feelings not expressed in T’s presence were communicable in her/his absence; once the interview fragments were strung together into prose they released a more intimate reading experience. Affection, coloured by loss, turned into nostalgia captured by the transcription process. Within the flow of sentences a new character called ‘You’ appeared.

I had prepared the prose version of the fragments for larding. The prose was full of repetitions, shifts in style, jumps in time and space. I sat down to begin writing into these fissures but stopped – the gaps between the sentences were the dynamic features. In Eimear McBride’s debut novel *A Girl is a Half Formed Thing*, the leaps from sentence to sentence sustain momentum in first person, present tense prose. The slight dislocation between the sentences communicates a sense of being on the back foot, caught off guard and in motion between internal thoughts and the external world:

24. FRAN MASON, *The A to Z or Post-modernist Literature and Theatre*, s.v. ‘OuLiPo’ (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 241.

I ride the bus. It's condensation. Smother. You sitting just behind. And quiet. You don't say a word. I'm turned from it. That did not happen to you or me today. I think. I will not think of you. I think. Uncle. What would you think of me sitting thinking of you? My head at work and turned away from everything happening here. Their cigarette smoke roaming up from the back for you. For a way to spit in your eye I think splitly. It gives me. No. Turn from that and turn away.²⁵

The acceleration of McBride's choppy prose allowed me to piece together her character: her distracted tension, the jeopardy of her situation and her experience of adolescence. The prose allowed me to imagine these conditions through the lost time and space between each sentence. I decided to refrain from closing the gaps in *You are of vital importance to the art community*.

Writing *You are of vital importance to the art community* was a process of becoming intimate with the interviews through transcription, then becoming distant from the transcriptions through cutting up, categorising and graphically arranging the fragments. The final imposition of a prose form onto the fragments synthesised them back into a vocal register but by doing so I foregrounded repetitions, ruptures and rhythm which in turn created the momentum for the character You to accrete and vanish within the duration of a year.

25. EIMEAR MCBRIDE, *A Girl Is A Half-formed Thing* (London: Galley Beggar, 2013), 50.

12. Notes

04.10.15

When writing the character don't withdraw from sentimentality.

Adam Phillips praises the 'lack of casual sentimentality' in *Mr Phillips*.¹ David Foster Wallace defended sentimentality against the ironic, post-modern American literature in the 1990s:

The next real literary "rebels" in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles. Who treat plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and hip fatigue.²

Today's risks are different. The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the "Oh how banal." To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness.³

The character exists in the space between people.

The character exists in the 'intermediate area' between people, the 'potential space' where cultural experience is located.⁴

Remember: Bollas' metaphor of a room full of objects moved by a ghost.⁵ But what about a person's internal life of the mind? Bollas writes:

[...] our internal world is characterized by the other's effect upon us, something that the theory of projective identification and other theories of unconscious communication now address. In other words, we are internally shaped by the presence and actions of the other. Although it is difficult to witness how one person "moves through" the other, like a ghost moving through the internal

1. ADAM PHILLIPS, 'Mr Phillips', *Equals* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 210,

2. DAVID FOSTER WALLACE, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction', *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (London: Abacus, 2001), 81.

3. Ibid.

4. JAN ABRAM, 'Transitional Phenomena', *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words*, s.v. 'Transitional phenomena' (2nd edn., London: Karnac, 2007), 337.

5. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2006), 54–57.

objects in the room of the other's mind, we know it is of profound significance, even though exceptionally difficult to describe.⁶

I think that this inner form within us, this outline or shape of the other, dynamic yet seemingly consistent, is indeed rather like a *revenant* within, as we have been affected by the other's movement through us, one that leaves its ghost inhabiting our mind, conjured when we evoke the name of the object.⁷

Jan Verwoert describes appropriation, in the context of contemporary art, as a means of exorcising unresolved histories of modernism:

Appropriation then is about performing the unresolved by staging objects, images or allegories that invoke the ghosts of unclosed histories in a way that allows them to appear as ghosts and reveal the nature of the ambiguous presence. And to do that is first of all a question of finding appropriate ways of going through the practicalities of the performance of evocation, that is: a question of practice.⁸

He goes on to describe the performativity of language with reference to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* in which a tale told to the narrator is immediately enacted by the un-dead twin sister of the Count of Usher.

It is this sudden realisation that words and images as arbitrarily construed as they may be, produce unsuspected effects and affects in the real world which could be said to mark the momentum of the 1990's. A shift in the critical discourse away from a primary focus on the arbitrary and constructed character of the linguistic sign towards a desire to understand the performativity of language and grasp precisely how things are done with words, that is, how language through its power of interpellation and injunction enforces the meaning of what it spells out and, like a spell placed on a person, binds that person to execute what it commands.⁹

Fiction or faction?¹⁰ Will the character be based on someone in everyday life? Ethical question (again).

Make the relationship between real life and literary fiction more porous. Are literary characters just a subset of factuality?

How will the character in everyday life inform the character in literature and vice versa?

6. CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London: Routledge, 2006), 56.

7. Ibid.

8. JAN VERWOERT, 'Living With Ghosts', *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, ed. Vanessa Ohlraun (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 147.

9. Ibid. 142–143.

10. PETRA BELC, 'Who is Sophie Calle? Performing the Self on the Borderline Between Fiction and Faction', *Magazine for Contemporary Visual Arts*, Vol. 92 (Zivot Umjetnosti, 2013), <<http://eds.b.ebscohost.com>>, accessed 16 Oct. 2015, 58–75.

The character can be an ‘evocative object’ used to compose another character’s character.

T perceived through the mirror of his 13 friends becomes a literary character – writing rendered his absence.

Artworks by Sophie Calle were fictionalised in Paul Auster’s novel *Leviathan*.¹¹ He used episodes from Calle’s practice to create a character named Maria. A year later Calle asked Auster to write a character for her to enact. Instead he wrote instructions for Calle to enhance her life in New York. Sophie Calle slips into Paul Auster’s fiction; Paul Auster’s fiction slips into Sophie Calle’s life. Calle and Auster make each other up. This process is archived in Calle’s book *The Rules of the Game*:

Since, in *Leviathan*, Auster has taken me as a subject, I imagine swapping roles and taking him as the author of my actions. I asked him to invent a fictive character which I would attempt to resemble. I was, in effect, inviting Paul Auster to do what he wanted with me, for a period of up to a year at most. Auster objected that he did not want to take responsibility for what might happen when I acted out the script he had created for me. Instead, he preferred to send me “Personal Instructions for S C on How to improve Life in New York City (Because she asked ...)”. I followed his directives. This project is entitled *Gotham Handbook*.¹²

One of Auster’s directives has the heading ‘Talking to Strangers’ under which he writes:

If you find yourself running out of things to say, bring up the subject of the weather. Cynics regard this as a banal topic, but the fact is that no subject gets people talking faster.¹³

Weather is a great equalizer. There is nothing anyone can do about it, and it affects us all in the same way – rich and poor, black and white, healthy and sick. The weather makes no distinctions. When it rains on me it also rains on you. Unlike most of the problems we face, it is not a condition created by man. It comes from nature, or God, or whatever else you want to call the forces in the universe we cannot control. To discuss the weather with a stranger is to shake hands and put aside your weapons. It is a sign of good will, an acknowledgement of your common humanity with the person you are talking to.

With so many things driving us apart, with so much hatred and discord in the air, it is good to remember the things that bring us together. The more we insist on them in our dealings with strangers, the better morale in the city will be.¹⁴

The character talks to strangers.

11. PAUL AUSTER, *Leviathan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

12. SOPHIE CALLE, *Rules of the Game: With the Participation of Paul Auster* (London: Faber and Faber, Violette Editions, 1993), p. III.

13. PAUL AUSTER, SOPHIE CALLE, ‘Gotham Handbook’, *Rules of the Game: With the Participation of Paul Auster* (London: Faber and Faber, Violette Editions, 1993), 3.

14. *Ibid.* 239–240.

Make instructions or drills for the character.

Does the character partake in socially unacceptable behaviour?

Uninvited intimacy? Impersonal intimacy?

In Calle's *The Address Book* the owner found Calle's process of contacting all the people listed in his address book to be intrusive and unacceptable.¹⁵ The writer Chris Kraus refers to the crossing of boundaries between public and private in Calle's artworks and in her epistolary novel *I Love Dick*. She writes, 'I jokingly compared myself to Calle when I was writing *I Love Dick* – I fell in love with someone named Dick and started writing him letters and everybody said that this was stalking – although I didn't see it this way at all [...].'¹⁶

Calle and Kraus move into the private space of their subject without invitation. What happens when this movement is reciprocated by the subject?

Will I, the writer, be present as an absent listener?

An interview creates two characters: one rendered through answers, the other through questions and the quality of their listening.

In the preface to *Promises Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis*, Adam Phillips writes, 'Listening to what people say, which is more or less what psychoanalysis consists of, should be above all a reminder of fellow feeling.'¹⁷

Jan Verwoert writes:

The labour of affect is the sustained effort of keeping oneself exposed to feelings. This sustained exposition to feeling creates an invisible foundation on which society is built. Society only comes into existence when people feel themselves exist in relation to each other.¹⁸

15. CHRIS KRAUS, 'We Need Your Dick Out Here: Chris Kraus on Sophie Calle', *C: International Contemporary Art*, Issue 73, 1 Mar. 2002, ProQuest, < <http://resolver.ebscohost.com>>, accessed 16 Oct. 2015, 36.

16. Ibid. 32.

17. ADAM PHILLIPS, *Promises Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. xiv.

18. JAN VERWOERT, 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: On the Risk of Bearing Witness and the Art of Affective Labour', *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, ed. Vanessa Ohlraun (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 272.

Conversation constitutes society.

In Will Eaves' episodic novel *The Absent Therapist* characters speak to absent listeners. The listener's character is in turn evoked through the anecdotes they elicit from the speaker in an inverted portraiture.

'So I go to the conductor, 'Can I smoke on the train?' I'm being polite. Hazel says I'm aggressive but I ain't. Least I'm asking him. Fuck do you want? And he goes, 'Sir. If you smoke you'll be arrested. It's as simple as that. It's as simple as that,' he goes. 'It's been that way for three or four years now. It's a railway by-law.' So I go, 'What if you haven't been in society for three or four years?' and he fucks off down the carriage shaking his head. Nice one. Can't smoke. He'll send me back to prison for smoking. Like to see him try.'¹⁹

The novels *Vox*²⁰ by Nicholson Baker and *Your Fathers, Where Are They? And the Prophets, Do They Live Forever?*²¹ by Dave Eggers are written without a narrator, the characters narrate each other through reported speech.

'I want to talk to you about talking, that commonest of all our intended activities. Talking is our public link with one another: it is a need; it is an art; it is the chief instrument of all instruction; it is the most personal aspect of our private lives.'²²

'Communication is not transmission, but a sharing that becomes subject: sharing as subject of all "subjects". An unfolding, a dance, a resonance.'²³

'Finally, the language we learn is a spoken one.'²⁴

No narrator at all.

19. WILL EAVES, *The Absent Therapist* (London: CB Editions, 2014), 38.

20. NICHOLSON BAKER, *Vox* (London: Granta Books, 1992).

21. DAVE EGGERS, *Your Fathers, Where Are They? And the Prophets, Do They Live Forever?* (London: Penguin, 2015).

22. WILLIAM H. GASS, 'On Talking to Oneself', *Habitations of the Word: Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 206.

23. JEAN-LUC NANCY, *Listening*, Charlotte Mandell trans. (New York: Fordham University, 2007), 41.

24. WILLIAM H. GASS, 'On Talking to Oneself', *Habitations of the Word: Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 206.

Part IV

Social Script

You are invited to read the book *Social Script*.

Tailpiece

In 1971 Winnicott published *Playing and Reality*.¹ This was his final book and his most complete articulation of the relationship between play, transitional objects, potential space and cultural experience. After the end of the book he wrote a 'Tailpiece', an addendum which makes a plea for an 'essential paradox'.² This paradox is described as a 'conception-perception' gap which must be allowed for when infants play and adults experience culture. What immersive play and cultural experience exercise is the individual's imagination and capacity for invention. What is paradoxical is the location of these imaginative experiences which neither belong to 'inner or external (shared) reality',³ he writes:

The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play.⁴

Winnicott is not using the 'essential paradox' to mystify the location of cultural experience, he is arguing against asking the question: 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?'⁵ Imagination, invention and illusion draw together inner and outer experiencing through happenstance which is central to this paradox.

Looking back over the duration of this research I am struck by the way methods and characters have sprung from a process which has allowed for happenstance to become charged with imagination. Immersive writing and reading have been conditions of the research, like two pillars holding up the structure, methodology and outcomes of the thesis. If this thesis had a covert aim it was not to mitigate the fundamental uncertainty of writing or to ignore doubts which halt the writing process, these are part of criticality. By more clearly rendering the generative moment between one work and the next I wish to affirm the continuity and regeneration of writing practice. However, this rendering has also been necessarily incomplete. The reflective methodology enacted in this manuscript also draws attention to the infinite nature of the task. Redescribing the writing of the studies was a potentially limitless exercise which would never fully account for the 'not-knowing'⁶ Barthelme describes.

The last year of this doctoral research produced *Social Script*: a character study,

1. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971).

2. Ibid. 177.

3. Ibid. 16.

4. Ibid. 118.

5. JAN ABRAM, *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words*, s.v. 'The essential paradox' (2nd edn., London: Karnac, 2007), 352.

6. see Ch. 1, n. 10.

a conclusion to this thesis and a research outcome. *Social Script* was generated through the methodology enacted in this reflective manuscript. The critical redescription of *Emmet*, *Mark* and *You are of vital importance to the art community* fed the narrative structure of *Social Script*. Three primary features of *Social Script* can be traced back to critical/generative insights. First, the role of the narrator proved difficult to square with a relational concept of character. In *Emmet* the narrator augments Emmet but does not relate to him. In *Mark* the narrator-writer invents and reinvents a memory. The polyphonic character You is narrated by a community, here the pronoun ‘you’ folds narrator, character and reader together. *Social Script* reduces the narrator to an absolute minimum, establishing two characters as each other’s narrators through reported speech. Liberated from an intrusive narrator, the characters evolve in relation to each other.

Second, oscillating the proximity to and distance from a character does not always operate as critique. Keeping Emmet on the cusp of becoming prevented him from coalescing into a character with depth – not knowing a character too easily becomes not caring. In *Mark* it is the narrator-writer who is critiqued as they try to overcome a distance from Mark. *You are of vital importance to the art community* wildly oscillates the distance from and proximity to the character. But because You is always on the point of dispersal the object of the critique becomes the precarity of an artistic community. Emmet is the only man in a room of strangers; Mark is fundamentally unknowable and You is a stranger in town: strangeness operates as a distance in all three studies. *Social Script* turns the characters’ status as strangers into an explicit feature of the narrative’s structure. They meet as strangers and engage in an overt process of working out what they want and who they are in relation to each other.

Third, fictionalising factual material generates issues which inform the writing process. There is an ethical dimension to making *people* up. Even if character *is* fiction in life and in literature, porting real people into a fictional narrative leads to questions of representation. Emmet is not a representation of a real person, although my previous experiences of workshops in adult education curtailed his character. *Mark* is a protracted and convoluted discourse on the representation of a real, vulnerable boy. The character You was derived from a real person but is viewed through the factual lens of a network of peers. You is a character invented by a group and refracted through interviews. Writing *Mark* and *You are of vital importance to the art community* enacted ethical limitations of representing real people. *Social Script* was written in response to weekly, hour-long conversations conducted between September 2015 and July 2016. These conversations were recorded and transcribed forming a departure point for writing. Beginning as strangers without any prior social bonds the participant

and I discovered we were free to make each other up. Our differences in gender, social class and age slowly became the subject of our conversations as we explored the conventional ‘social scripts’ engendered by our everyday lives. Using relational exercises to escape into less stultifying enclaves is a theme in *Emmet. Social Script*, like *You are of vital importance to the art community*, builds on conversations I have had. Mark provided an ethical awareness of how to work with my participant. By returning to the collaboration between Calle and Auster,⁷ the narrative constraints of Baker’s *Mezzanine*⁸ and the low-key conversations in Lanchester’s *Mr Phillips*⁹ I began to piece together a relational approach to *Social Script*.

Social Script is a script for a conversation, a conversation in a book and a ‘relational’ character study. The knowing and not knowing which oscillates between the characters, and when reading the characters, is produced by the unusual circumstances of their conversations. She and He explore unstructured time. She pays him for conversation. She uses the conversations to find out what she wants. She invites him to do the same but He is reluctant. He and She engage in mutual witnessing. Their ‘impersonal intimacy’¹⁰ yields unexpected emotional and physical proximity. This is all achieved behind the modesty screen of a financial agreement. The characters are simultaneously rendered as they get to know and ‘unknow’¹¹ each other. With the defining ‘facts’ of their lives held back the characters of She and He are contingent upon what happens in each conversation. *Social Script* stages a peculiar scenario and turns the peculiarity into narrative momentum: Why is She having these conversations? What does She want? Why is He there? Will they just talk? These questions yield character as trust is attempted. But these questions simultaneously expose a friction around the desire to know the other in an unstructured scenario shared by strangers.

The reflective methodology enacted in the second year of research was a means of finding the narrative structure for a more ‘relational’ character study. The methodology was non-prescriptive but also critical and generative. By replacing interpretation with redescription I was able to reflect on the studies without being evaluative or analytical: to, ‘[...] add on something of value to what is already there, to redescribe something with a view to a preferred future.’¹² The methodology was devised in the wake of writing *You are of vital importance* and derived from models I discovered through practice. Reflective statements are an established feature of fine art pedagogy, in

7. see Ch. 12, p. 127.

8. see Ch. 8, pp. 86–87.

9. see Ch. 5, p. 52.

10. see Ch. 2, p. 18.

11. SARAH TRIPP, ‘Come here unknow’, *You are of vital importance*, eds. Jane Rolo and Camilla Wills (London: Book Works, 2014), 99.

12. see Ch. 3, n. 11.

this context reflective writing is a critical tool. The narrative structure of Markson's *Reader's Block*,¹³ the reflexive form of the essay,¹⁴ Wittig's 'double critical movement',¹⁵ Sontag's critique of interpretation¹⁶ and Phillips' notion of 'redescription'¹⁷ all came to my attention during the writing of *You are of vital importance*. In this way the reflective methodology was practice-led.

I want to return to Wittig's 'double critical movement' to propose a third critical movement discovered by writing this reflective manuscript. When writing characters I am also an individual expressing my 'idiom' (self).¹⁸ The character I write *is* a personal effect which constitutes my character. In other words, writing characters renders my character. In the gap Bollas theorises between the expressive moment (writing) and the incomplete apprehension of one's own meaning, '[...] his reflections will always lag behind himself, more often than not puzzled by his itness, yet relieved by the *jouissance* of its choosings,'¹⁹ is a third critical movement. I have reflected on who I am in relation to the characters: Emmet, Mark and You. Personal insights produced by enacting the reflective methodology lie outside the boundary of this thesis, which has been written for a public readership. I want to note this third critical movement as of personal and creative value.

I contributed to Wittig's 'double critical movement' a third critical movement: noticing how the writing of a character expresses my idiom thus rendering my character. Emmet, Mark and You echo an ongoing concern with my own sense of displacement within a social milieu. By writing these characters I was able to work through the fragility of, and power wielded by, outsiders. The compromises of assimilation are explored by these characters as liberating, persecutory and as contortions necessary for social survival. These insights produced by the third critical movement led to the practice of 'social scripting' the final work *Social Script*.

Becoming the participant in an ongoing conversation with a stranger allowed me to write from the experience of a real tension between wanting to know someone and also wanting to remain unknown by them. Recording and transcribing our conversations formed the foundation from which I was able to imagine the kind of conversation I wanted to have: a conversation that mitigates the desire to prescribe character with attempts to remain unknowable, nascent and beyond representation by the 'other'. *Social Script* tries to hold onto the tension between strangers and forestall assimilation.

13. see Ch. 3, p. 27.

14. see Ch. 3, p. 26.

15. see Ch. 3, n. 15.

16. see Ch. 3, n. 7, n. 8.

17. see Ch. 3, n. 10, n. 11.

18. see Ch. 2, n. 18.

19. Ibid.

In the first year of my doctoral research the ‘not-knowing’²⁰ aspect of writing was ‘allowed for.’²¹ Compositional writing yielded the book *You are of vital importance* and five models were discovered which were later integrated into the reflective methodology. The writing departed from *The Premise of Practice* and *The Premise of Character* described in Chapters 1 and 2. In *The Premise of Character* I argued that a relational concept of character critiques claims to know each other. In *The Premise of Practice* I outlined perennial features of my practice and my approach to performative, practice-led research. Between these premises I was traversing from ‘not-knowing’ when writing as described by Barthelme, ‘[...] what I do know comes into being at the instant it’s inscribed’,²² to not knowing other people as described by Bollas, ‘Because we do not comprehend one another (in the discreet, momentous conveying of the contents of our internal world) we are therefore free to invent one another.’²³ In both instances not-knowing sponsors the invention of character, especially if a real person is being represented in writing. I want to suggest that writing characters could be a practice whereby the writer gives form to unresolvable tensions around knowing and not-knowing people. Processes as solitary as reading and writing make critical space for the exploration of these tensions by the writer and the reader.

Finally, I want to consider two sentences by Lisa Robertson from *Nilling*. The sentences belong to two consecutive paragraphs about reading and writing:

Within reading I desire lastingness in tandem with the falling away.

Writing proposes itself as a possible technique towards lastingness.²⁴

For Robertson the ‘lastingness’ of reading is an immersion she describes as ‘affective expansion of my receptive capacity’ and ‘falling away’ is an ‘inability to receive’. Immersion in reading comes and goes, attention is voluntarily given to a page but the imagination *dérives*. Robertson then begins a new paragraph to consider writing and ‘lastingness’. Here she describes turning to her notebook mid-way through reading a book, she balances the notebook on her lap as she is about to write. Her body temporarily becomes a desk and writing proposes ‘lastingness’ through inscription.²⁵

For a character to be relational it must also be provisional. For a provisional

20. see Ch. 1, n. 9, n. 10, n. 11.

21. D.W. WINNICOTT, *Playing and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1971), 177.

22. see Ch 1, n. 10.

23. see Ch 2, n. 25.

24. LISA ROBERTSON, ‘Lastingness: Réage, Lucrèce, Arendt’, *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, The Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias* (Toronto: BookThug, 2012), 26.

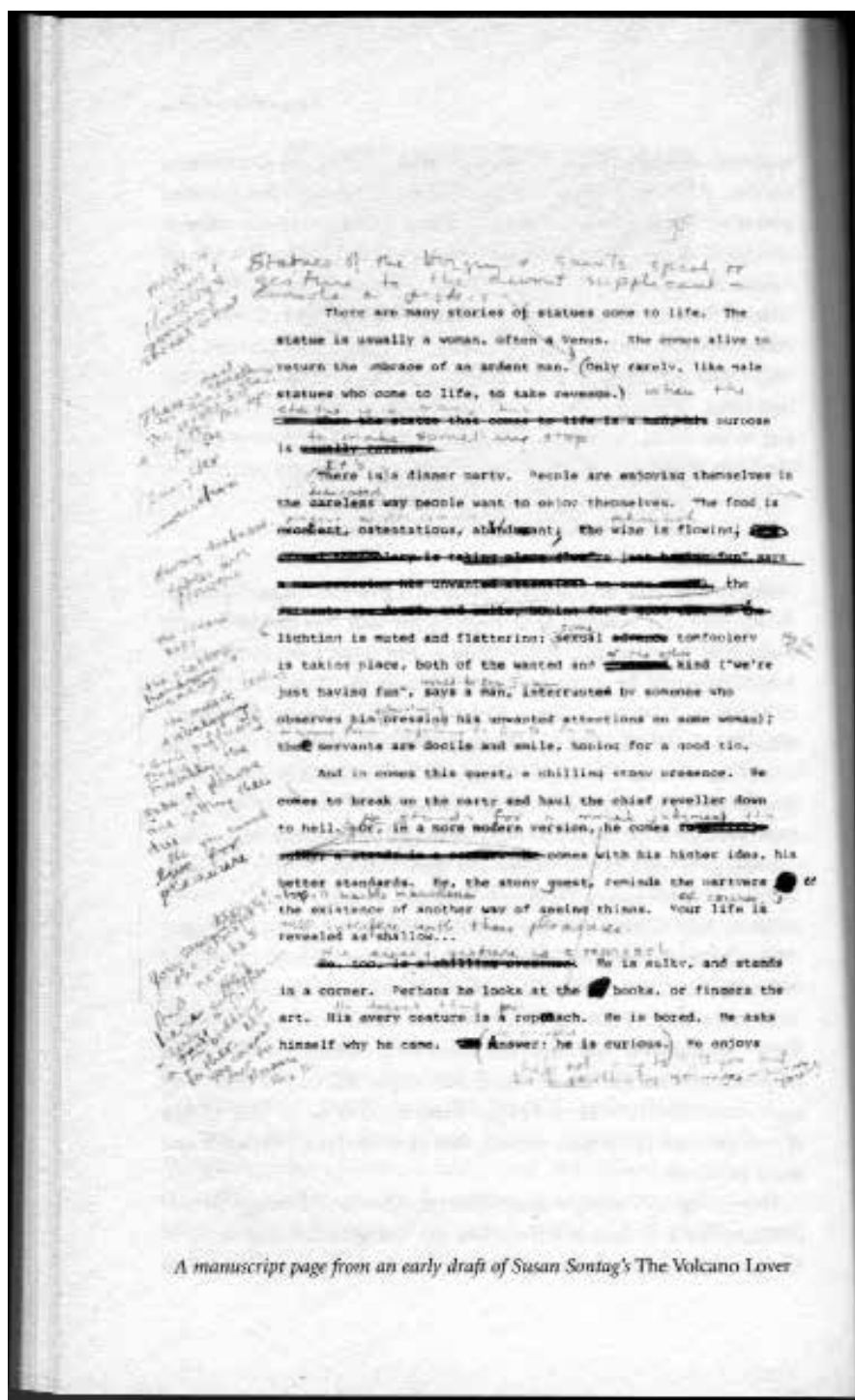
25. Ibid.

character to exist off the page in the imagination of a reader the narrative must oscillate. Paragraphs, sentences and words must play with the proximity to and distance from the character. This play is felt across many relationships: between different characters, character and narrator, writer and narrator, reader and character, reader and narrator and so on. To be provisional in the form of print the writing must be in flux. Between the falling away of reading and the lastingness of written words is a potential space of imagination and invention. Between Robertson's sentences is the paradox which makes 'relational' characters exist.

I have constituted myself as a critical reader of *You are of vital importance* and reconstituted myself back as a writer of *Social Script*. I offer you these two books and the methodology enacted in this reflective manuscript as the three components of my thesis and my research outcomes.

Appendix A





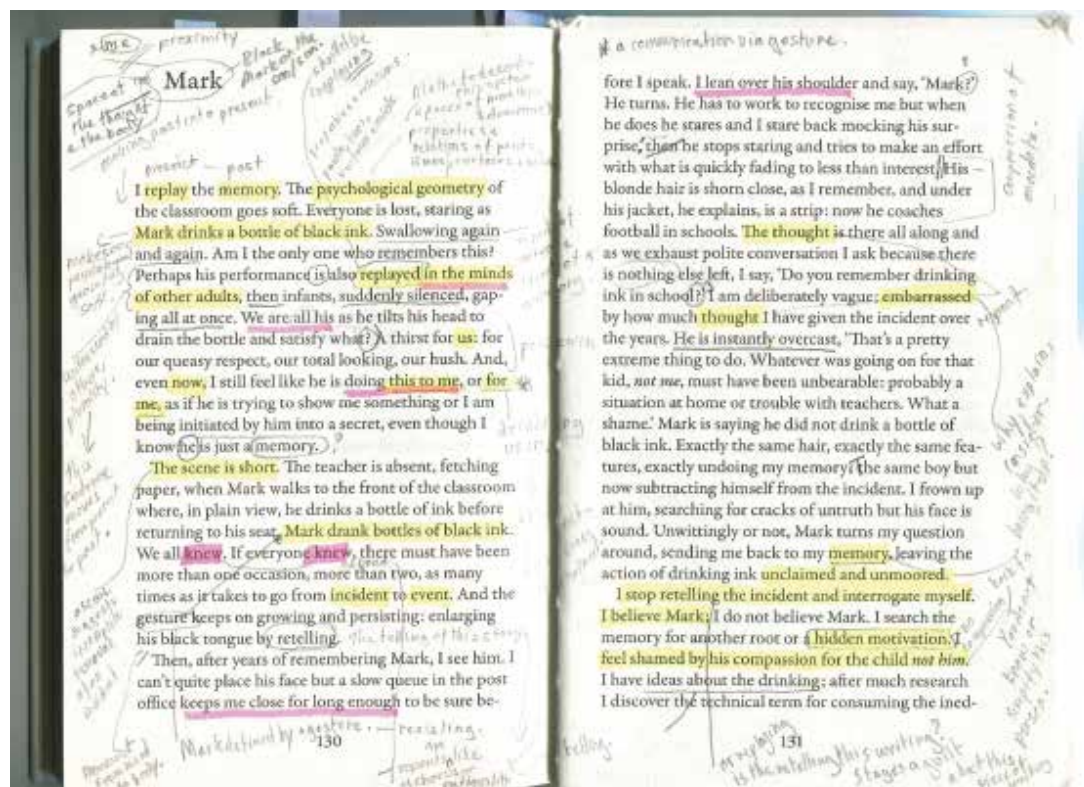
A manuscript page from an early draft of Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover* reproduced in *The Paris Review Interviews: Women Writers at Work*.

(18) You are of vital importance to the art community

You arrive on Valentine's day. A friend of a friend helps you move. There is a big openness. Your life is kind of free of a lot of restrictions. You are a sweet person, quite honest in a way. You blush easily. You bite gently at the soft lining of your inner cheek. Sometimes you look like you are a bit on your own. People introduce you to their lives. You like just about everybody. There is this sense that there's a lot going on. You pretend to be naïve as if you don't really know what's going on. You don't really know what's going on. You go to Mono. You go to the GFT (Look back to remember the way you came. You are self-effacing. You don't feel an obligation to do certain things in life in the way that some people might.

Somebody makes a suggestion. You offer to help because you don't have a job and you're looking for ways into things, so you just hang out a bit painting walls. You studied at Goldsmiths. You studied at Saint Martins. You go to the Hot Club. You go to the 13th Note. You're at the Transmission summer party, lying on the bowling lawn with friends, and you look incredibly handsome as if you've just sort of appeared from nowhere. You re-appear a few times at other art events, you have a new haircut, there's something different about you.

40



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Quickness

I will start by telling you an ancient legend.

Late in life the emperor Charlemagne fell in love with a German girl. The barons at his court were extremely worried when they saw that the sovereign, wholly taken up with his amorous passion and unmindful of his regal dignity, was neglecting the affairs of state. When the girl suddenly died, the courtiers were greatly relieved—but not for long, because Charlemagne's love did not die with her. The emperor had the embalmed body carried to his bedchamber, where he refused to be parted from it. The Archbishop Turpin, alarmed by this macabre passion, suspected an enchantment and insisted on examining the corpse. Hidden under the girl's dead tongue he found a ring with a precious stone set in it. As soon as the ring was in Turpin's hands, Charlemagne fell passionately in love with the archbishop and hurriedly had the girl buried. In order to escape the embarrassing situation, Turpin flung the ring into Lake Constance. Charlemagne thereupon fell in love with the lake and would not leave its shores.

This legend, "taken from a book on magic," is set down even more concisely than I have recorded it in a book of unpublished notes by the French Romantic writer Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly (you can find it in the notes to the *Pléiade* edition of Barbey d'Aurevilly's works, L1315). Ever since I read it, the legend has

Appendix D

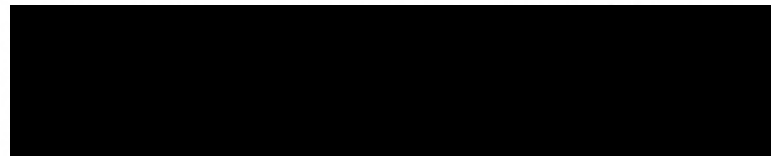


Photographs of objects previously belonging to T held in the T Archive.

Appendix E

of just committing to it. And that in turn leaves a gap, there's a sort of negativity to that, which is possibly why people are frustrated or angry about the situation because ■■■ not responding. So, I don't necessarily want to add to the things that are offered to ■■■ that gives him something else to not respond to.

There's maybe another way round. If I could positively not say anything that would be interesting. A provocation of some kind that is positive. Mmm, I need to think about that.



I got the impression it was a very Art School thing, the arch irony, the interest in the banal, here's a crap record isn't it great. In one sense I found it amusing, there is a certain amount to be found funny in that but it stops very quickly.

When I saw ■■■ performance in the Street Level it was so weird and so provocatively banal, that I thought this is interesting because ■■■ was doing so little and yet it filled up the space. It had conviction and that was interesting. But when it came to conversing beyond the superficial it was extremely hard. Sometimes ■■■ seemed to expect that but ■■■ needed it come all from the other. ■■■ wasn't opening up a space for that conversation.

■■■ asked me to go round ■■■ house sometime after ■■■ split up with ■■■ and there was almost nothing to say, it was hard work. And ■■■ played some records and thing. And I realised there was a certain amount of small talk expected which I am terrible at, especially under pressure like that. I do hear of people just sitting around in their houses chatting about trivial things, often men of a certain age and I have no idea what they're doing or how to do it. Unless it's someone I already know and we can adopt that sort of thing. But the assumption that it's possible on any occasion with anyone is really strange.

Plus ■■■ wasn't particularly on top form. ■■■ wasn't doing very well. But there wasn't any space there that I felt like I could begin to talk about that sort of thing.

It wasn't inhospitable but at the same time it wasn't easy to talk to ■■■ (it wasn't easy to talk for ■■■). There was an expectation of that. That might have just been me.

What do you think he wanted?

Something to happen. I think he could be too easily be comfortable and boring. ■■■ was very bored here because ■■■ couldn't work. ■■■ couldn't make any work. ■■■ was doing odds and ends and spent a lot of time looking for houses. Doing those kind of tasks that are really soul destroying.

And when ■■■ first appeared, ■■■ been at Goldsmiths and made some interesting work and ■■■ had more energy about ■■■ coming from London. Then ■■■ moved up here to be with ■■■. I guess, I think there was enough distraction here but I don't think there was enough momentum from what ■■■ was doing there.

■■■ had a signed copy of a postcard by Jacques Derrida which ■■■ got signed in London. When ■■■ got it signed Derrida said, "Oh, nice pen." I always find that fantastically amusing. Derrida's signature is one of the most enigmatic concepts never mind the populism of that gesture being an autograph. And ■■■ was very blasé about that. Oh it's in a box somewhere, but I think ■■■ knew how conceptually interesting that was.

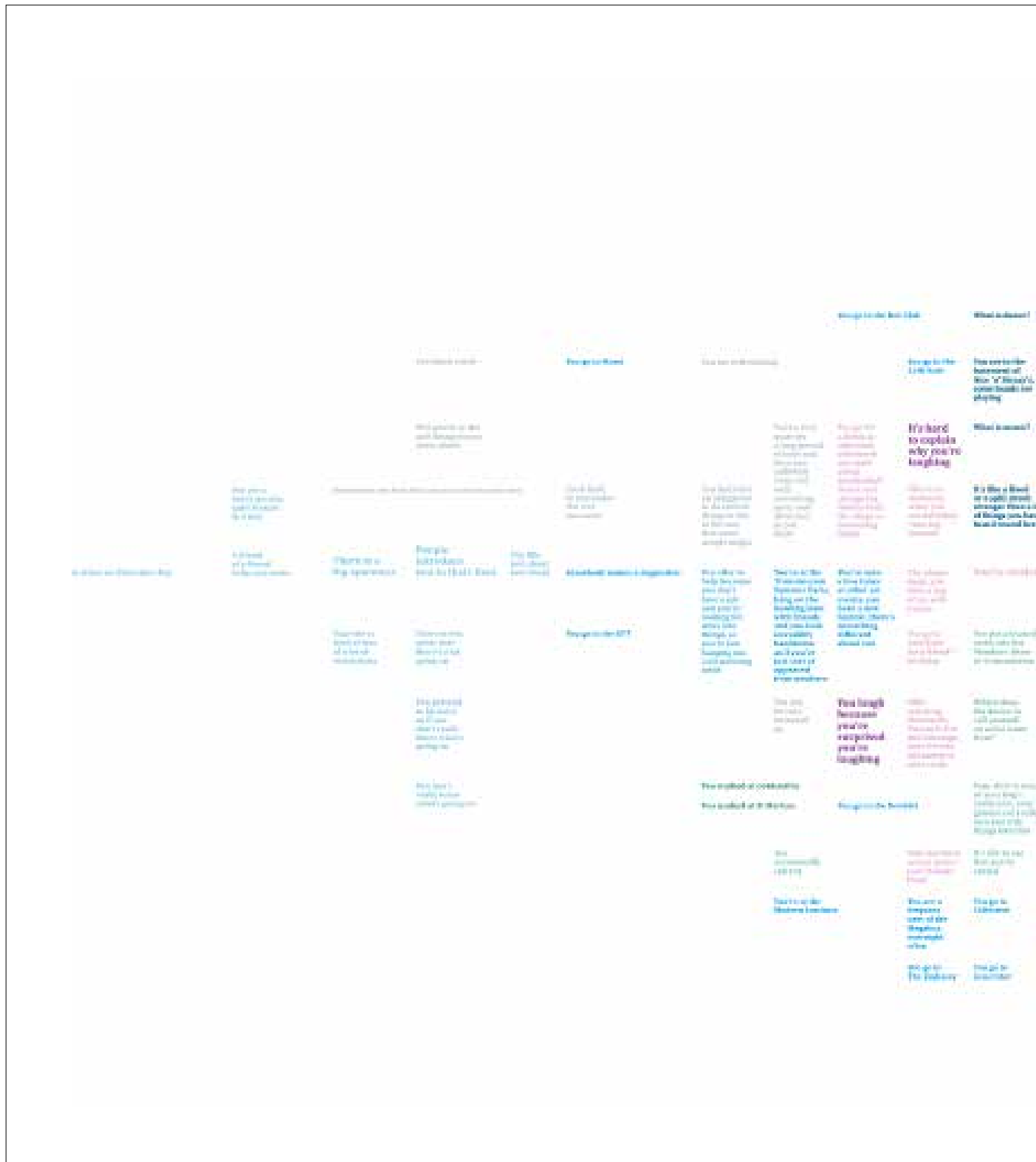
Explain that to me.

Because Derrida had written about the signature and ideas of style and what happens when you sign for something to say I here confirm that I am here. Saying yes to this confirming this with this gesture, this mark. Yet it's more than writing it promises something that the one who made the signature was there and confirms more, it does more than ordinary text does.

So his signature, having written so much about that kind of thing, has a little bit more cache if you like, it has something about it, of all the signatures you could have one is conceptually the most interesting because it's got this folding back on itself conceptual double bluff kind of thing. I need to reread the stuff to give you a more coherent account. And that book is about presence and absence and text and amorous postcards sent from him to his wife while he was on a lecture tour. And one of the postcards he found was of Plato and Socrates. I think Plato is behind Socrates, one's behind the other and one's writing and he pointed out that this was really interesting because it's the wrong way round. So I guess it must be Socrates writing and Plato is behind him, I need to check.

Anonymised page from a transcribed interview held in the T Archive.

Appendix F



Rewritten extracts from the T interviews arranged in Adobe Illustrator.

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